



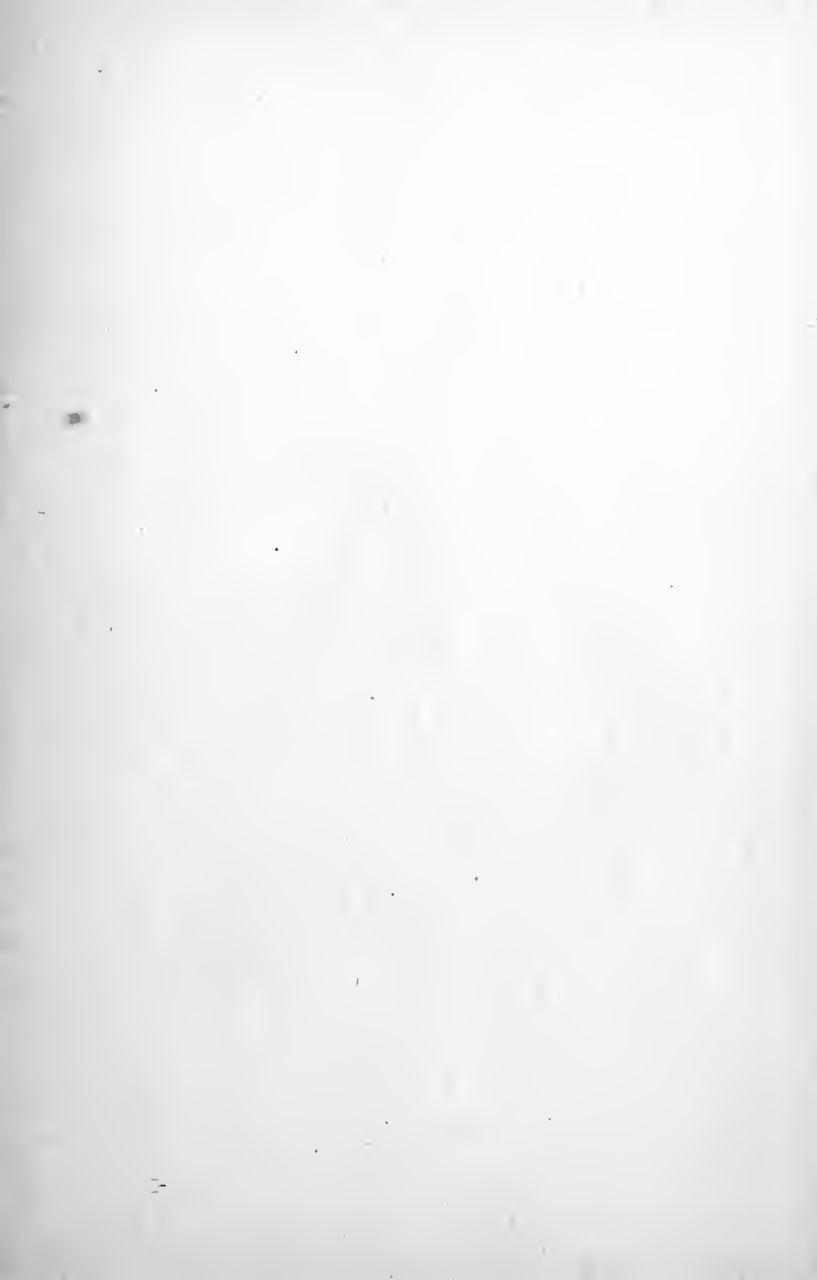


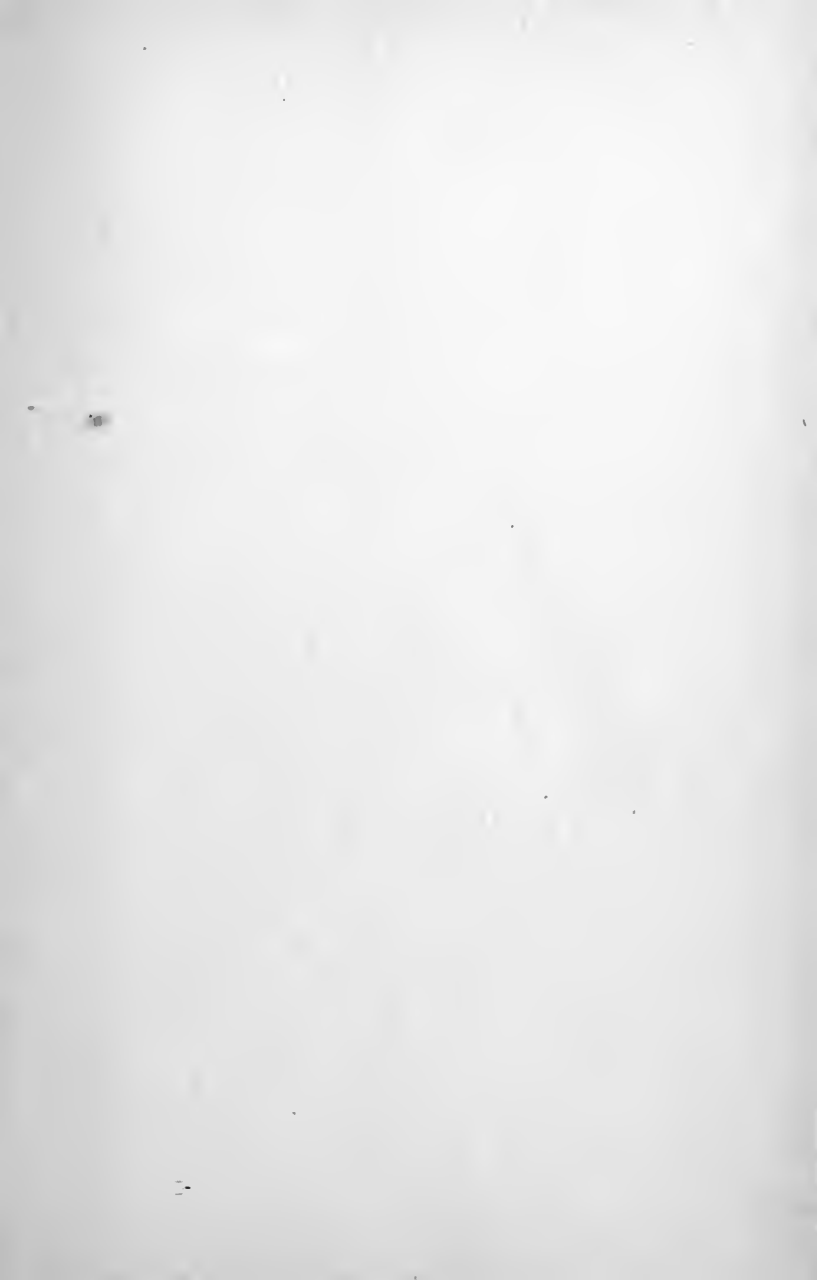
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BROKEN MUSIC

BROKEN MUSIC

Selected Verse

BY
BENJAMIN R. C. LOW



NEW YORK
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TO
MY PARTNERS AND FRIENDS
ETHELBERT I. LOW
AND
CHARLES D. MILLER

Grateful acknowledgment is made to

JOHN LANE COMPANY

of its permission, generously given, to draw freely,
for the purposes of this volume, upon the following
books by the same author previously published by it:
The Sailor Who Has Sailed; A Wand and Strings;
The House That Was, and The Pursuit of Happiness.

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BROKEN MUSIC

BROKEN MUSIC

THE VIGIL-AT-ARMS

O THOU that in the deepness of the night
Beholdest me;—
Captain of Kings, invisible and dight
With mystery:
Thou that art death, and ridest on a sword;
Thou that art love, upon a cross adored;
Thou that art life, and life eternal, Lord,
I kneel to thee.

I am as yonder taper on thy shrine,—
Late-lit and tall;
My spirit bows with every breath that thine
Here letteth fall:—
The flickering world is witched and turned and
trolled;
And oh, my heart is wax, that once was bold;
I perish straightway save that thou uphold;—
Thou that art all.

It was but lately that a child I came
First upon life;—

The Vigil-at-Arms

Loving spring flowers, gentle, without blame,
 Knowing not strife:
The world was old ere battles bloomed for me;
Boyhood was dreams, and swooning minstrelsy;
I wandered all alone and wandered free
 Where dreams are rife.

But all at once the silver-crested surge
 Ceased to be cloud,
And thundered over me; I felt the scourge
 And sting, and bowed
Under the brine, until, half-dead, I lay
Forspent upon the sand; and from that day,
Triumphant-tongued, the fury of the fray
 Calls me aloud.

Let priestly pardoners still shrive the world,
 White and aloof;
Mine be the battle-flame, the fear unfurled,—
 The storming hoof;
Let me be mingled with a maze of blows;
Hard pressed to live, heart mad, beset with foes,
Or, lance in rest, ride down the lists' enclose
 To peril's proof.

I would drink deeply, Lord, past joy and pain,
 Down to the lees;
I would live life to every utmost vein;
 Like sap in trees

The Vigil-at-Arms

Let me know root and branch; let this be mine,
To drain the world's whole heritage of wine;—
Co-parcener of pain with thee and thine. . . .
I ask not ease.

Yet, round my battered helm may dreams be born,
And raptures spring,
As I have seen fair clouds a craggy horn
Engarlanding:
Let dreams be wings and waft me from the ground;—
With sprigs of Arcady my brow be crowned,
And where I lie, all battle-stained, be found
The fairy ring.

Let me look back on boyhood and be fain
Of childish cheer;
Make after fight, like robins after rain,
Glad thoughts appear:
Remind me of the sweetness of the May;
Pink apple-blooms with starlight on their spray;
Exotic odors out of yesterday;
Let such be near.

Let such be near, through all the storm and fret,
Near in the fight;
The bitter wrong, the sorrow, the regret,
Let these make right:
For I no longer, Lord, take bribes of joy,
Nor follow rainbows as did once a boy;

The Vigil-at-Arms

Give me my dreams and let the years destroy
Other delight.

Give me the steps that unto Heaven's blue
Steeply aspire;
Lift me with song, and all my thoughts imbue
With spirit fire:
Mine be the mould and measure of a man;
Let me be strong, O Lord, to build thy plan,
But lest I fail, let me be greater than
My heart's desire.

Like one that dwelling inland comes at last
Upon the sea;
Breathing strange breaths, and but a pebble-cast
From mystery;
So I upon a headland here do stand
Fronting the whole of life, my forehead fanned
With strong sea-wind, and out, far out, from land
The future see.

Lord, is it cloud, or is it castle, there
Beyond the brim?
What heavenly towers, Lord, are those, so fair,
So great and grim?
Are those the gates that glitter, as with gold;
In mother-of-pearl are those the bastions bold;
And is it war, and do the warriors hold
The ocean's rim?

The Vigil-at-Arms

Nay, for the long horizon fills the rain,

Soft shadows creep,

And blind oblivion falls upon the main,

As of a sleep:

I drink old voices, drear and out of kin;

Half-uttered wails of prophecy begin;

I hear of heroes dying, in the din

Where dies the deep.

I am afraid, Lord; is it thither thou

Would'st have me go?

I am afraid, and would wend backward now

Where violets grow:

My heart is fickle for the fields, I yearn

Once more at eve to see my windows burn;

Once more (ah, let me!) down old paths to turn,—

I love them so.

Nay!—'tis the morrow, yonder leaded panes

No more are dim

With dark-browed infidels, but are the fanes

Of seraphim;

And holy saints and warriors are dight

With jeweled colors flaming in their flight,

And out of Heaven, wrapt in lovely light,

The rafters swim.

It is the morrow, Lord, the sweet airs blow

Up the long nave,

The Vigil-at-Arms

And plight the day's full troth, yet . . . ere I go,
 One thing I crave:
Thou that art death, and ridest on a sword;
Thou that art love, upon a cross adored;
Thou that art life, and life eternal, Lord,
 Let me be brave!

LIEBESTOD

I

LOVE AND DEATH

TILL death us part;—I dreamed that death was
now,
Pallid and old, unsought and drawing nigh:
I dreamed that death was now, and fled to thee
For thy warm mouth and beating heart, but thou—
Thou could'st not stay him, he was come for me;
I felt his fingers cold take mine to die;
Till death us part?—I dreamed that death was now.

I dreamed: 'twas but a dream that went and came;
Slipt moonshine between clouds; and yet,
Be thou the proof of that; my fingers—there—
I am not dead, then; follows still the flame
After me, where I brush your forehead bare:
I am not dead; your heart does not forget,
Your lips still know, your eyes droop down the
same:

A thousand kisses were no surfeiting;

Liebestod

I am not dead. But if the dream came true,
And I bereft thee at the last? Oh, then,
When lovers kissed, thus, 'twere a foolish thing,
And love, no more than idle summers, when
Flowers are blown, and breezes chance them
through,
And take their hearts, and leave them—lan-
guishing.

I might bear out such severance from thee
As years would eke the other's life on earth;
I might endure to wander sterile days
Without thee, so the end of it should be
Thyself: to hear thee from along deep ways,
And see thee coming, like a star, to birth,
Over sad marches, to eternity.

But, like twin candles, gutter life away,
And flicker down to nothingness?—ah, no!—
If that be love, then I will love no more;
I will not stoop to it, I will not stay
One further moment kneeling at thy door;
If that be love, I'll to a desert go,
And weather out the future, loveless; nay,

I would not even live, if that were all!
And still I hold thee, here, and still thou art
Continuous, like music, loving me.
But if no death, yet, when our fingers fall

At last from one another's, then shall we,
Man without strength, and woman without heart,
Love as of old?—can spirits love at all?

From what wraith-mist of nebulous disguise
Wilt thou unveil thyself; or, being known,
What moon-white love can give us what we knew?
For I shall have no arms in Paradise,
Nor thou, such lips to bring deep kisses to;
And all the pangs our hearts have overflown,
How shall we speak, no longer having eyes?

Forever sailing, here we find not, here
Are only haze and last horizon line;
Here only stars that dream around the world,
That droop, and dim, and draw not ever near;
Here only stars, and cloudy sails unfurled;
No landward lights, ours only, mine and thine;
No hoped for hills and pleasant islands here.

And yet—I would sail on so, having thee;
I would sail on, unnoticed and unknown,
Our soft affreightment slighted of the years,
Our mortal life made immortality;
I would sail on so, even with my tears;
Forever breathe thy loveliness, my own,
And ever, waking, wind thee nearer me.

The looms of Time weave on, weave on, and will;
The dial-shadow moves unmindful of

The lovers leaning on its travels so:
I know that somewhere destinies fulfil,
And howsoe'er I lose thee now, I know
That I shall find thee, yet—O God of love,
Let us, let us, be man and woman still!

II

LOVE WITHOUT DEATH

A crimson emptiness I've proved the rose,
That in its budding promised me divine;
The star that from the sunset's pallor blows,
Sinks in the sunset's half-drained lees of wine:
Deceitful was the happiness that drew
My hunger to the Islands of the Blest;
I was not happy though I came thereto;
Pity was mine, and shame, and great unrest:
I heard the sirens singing overseas,
And caught wept beauties from the Lotus shore;
I touched the blue-encircled, far Hesperides;
All, all were mine; I wish them mine no more.
 I have no pleasure in their pleasing, none;
 I only live that I may live for—one.

I see thee stand, beyond the death of dreams,
Above the drift of flower-fading years;
Thou wilt not ride the downward-running streams
To blue oblivion; thy tender tears

Have lifted thee too far for Time's hard hand,
The love that thou hast given gives thee now
Forgetfulness of fear: I see thee stand
Like some clear peak, the sunset in thy brow;
Immutable of heart, and gazing where shall shine
A thousand stars of holiness; where soon
Thou shall put on a whiteness more divine,
Withal, thy whiteness, underneath the moon.
Thou art so true, thou art thyself, and I,
I shall have thee when all the others die.

I shall have thee;—I know not in what land,
Past what imperial outposts never seen,
Beneath what towers too bright to understand;
I know not, save as sometimes I have been
Hard at their boundaries, looking, not with eyes,
Over broad seas, and twilight hills, or through
Wind-mingled boughs far upward into skies;
Save as I've heard strong voices that I knew,
Struggle to be, from under storms in trees,
And out of smothered speech that silence gave;
I know not in what land, beyond what seas
I know not, save that I shall have thee, save
That at the last no loss can ever be,—
Thou wilt reach down, and I shall come to thee.

TRYST BELOW ZERO

STARS all entangled in stiff twigs of trees;
Faded tapestries
Once tinted warm with sunset, as with wine;
The crunch of snow where wheel-tracks print
and freeze;
Then silence. How the breath gives counter-
sign!
Eyes, now—yours and mine.

Charmed druid circle of trunks bleak and
frore:—
Hidden is the spore
Of vital heat in them, crept underground.
But—touch of fingers—spring will swift restore
Their fervent sap and bated bliss profound.
Hearts, now—how they sound!

Each star a tooth to sting, each twig a spire
Tingling with quick fire:
Fixed in intense gaze, Beauty overpowers
To one white pinnacle of sharp desire.
Elysian pangs—taste of immortal flowers—
My kiss? Nay! 'twas ours!

SEAWARD

THE little boats, the little boats,
Go sailing out to sea;
With courage manned they leave the land,
And steer them steadfastly:
The sun turns gold, and on they hold,
A-sailing out to sea;
And I should like, and I should like,
To sail with them to thee.

The little birds, the little birds,
Go flying out to sea;
At some far call relinquish all,
And go intrepidly:
The sun's last red is in their stead,
And still they fly to sea;
And I should like, and I should like,
To fly with them to thee.

The little stars, the little stars,
Come out upon the sea;
Each candle light is lit to-night
With loving memory:
The day is done and one by one
They hover on the sea;
And I should like, and I should like,
To look with them on thee.

COÖRDINATES

TAWNY the sand; the strange, wildflower sea
All blue and overblown:
Cloudy with shadows what ship was she?
Why, with her sails, did she come to me,
Unforgotten, unknown?

Clewed-close to windward, she steadies yet
On one short tack inshore;
Low on her lee, with her bows washed wet,
Working her northing—should I forget?—
To Boston or Bangor.

Many a coaster swallowed at dark,
Waned with the afterglow,
Dearly I've loved; but none like that bark:
Some drift of stars we were meant to mark;
But what, I do not know.

EVEN-SONG

THE night and the day have met on the road,
Travelers faring afar;
Have met and kissed and gone on their way—
Their kiss is the evening star.

The night and the day have met on the road,
Wayfarers passing by;
The day has blushed at the glance of the night,—
Her blush is the evening sky.

The night and the day have met on the road,
Longing to linger there;
Have looked and sighed and said farewell,—
Their sigh is the evening air.

The night and the day have met on the road,
Tremulous, O my Sweet;
And all the twilight is faint with the prayer
That thou and I should meet!

SANCTUARY

THE shadow of a sail upon the sea;
The shadow of a cloud upon the sand;
I lie remembering of thee,
In a thirsty land.

Take me from the weariness of days
To where thou art, in fadeless beauty set:
Fold me from the sun's fierce blaze
With thy wings, dew-wet.

Be mine the utter wakefulness of night,
To lose no single graciousness of thee;
Reach thou cool fingers of delight
To my brow, the sea.

Let me be the rippling refrain
Which followeth the music that thou art:
Wind me with a silver skein
To thy beating heart.

The starlight that is lost among the trees;
The moonlight that is wasted on the land;
Thy love, which Heaven only sees,
Be mine—near at hand!

IN APRIL

IF there's wind upon the meadows, there is sunlight
in the trees,

There is glowing, golden sunlight, and desire;
If there's storm on stream and river, there are songs
and melodies,
There are songs that follow shepherds, and the lyre.

Up around the walls and hedges, down the roadsides
and the lanes,

There is strewing of first flowers, and delight;
There are evenings, long and shadowed, there are
homeward-wending wains,
There are robins giving gladness, and good-night.

If there's winter on our faces, there is summer in our
hearts,

There is laughing, leaping summer in our eyes;
And although as young as April, we are older than
all arts,
We are wiser than all wisdoms of the wise.

We have risen up from winter and are waiting with
the spring,

We are breathless for the summer and await;

In April

Far away on distant mountains we have heard her
heralding,

We are breathless for the summer, and a mate.

If there's wind upon the meadow, there is sunlight in
the trees,

There is golden, glowing sunlight, and desire;

If there's storm on stream and river, there are songs
and melodies,

There are songs that follow shepherds, and the
lyre.

THE FIRST DEATH

I COULD wish the world were, as lately, wound
In stiff, creaking mail,—
Perfect proof to storm, triple brass all around,
Bare-headed and pale:
It were better . . . trees are truest in rime,
And the fight best fought when stark branches climb
On a northeast gale.

This wide May morning, where the loosed winds go
Into cloudless air,
And white petals are flushed with pink, as though
The bosom were bare
Of a maid who trembled with love, and sighs;
It is all too sweet for my untamed eyes;
It is all too fair.

It is all too fashioned out of young men's dreams;
Such as tear them through
A whole forest of brambles, with soft gleams,
And then turn untrue:
And then prove to be faithless to those they led;
Who believed them, and followed, and fought, and
and bled,
And conquered—some few.

The First Death

I remember how, when flowers first came,
 I would reach a hand,
In hot haste to be plucking their white flame;
 Laid bare a whole land
With my forays, thinking thus I should get
What they were: always failed it, and yet
 Did not understand.

But oh, now . . . I know. This wide, morning place,
 And wind-tempered sky;
I would hold aloof, with averted face,
 And bid them pass by:
It will chance, I trust, I shall bear this thing,
As is needful; but not, not while the spring
 Is asking me why.

THE BLIND SEER

I FIND it pleasant here, of afternoons:
The sun is tempered by a taste of sea;
The beach is just below; and while I have
Enough of city not beyond my call,
The noise is lulled.

Sit there: the stone will cool
With early shadows from the temple wall:
Apollo with his hand before his face;
A jest I think of, more than once, with smiles.

How fell it that I am—this that I am?
I lost my eyes, and so . . . I learned to see.
I do not jest with you on this: 'tis truth,
As I will show, to patience and good heed.

Eyes? I had eyes beyond the most of men.
I touched each star of all the Pleiades;
Tracked deer at dawn; spied fish in runnel beds,
And sifted tree-tops through a driving rain.
I was the first, scarce but a lad, to see
The glint of galleys on the ocean's rim,
When friend or foe, we knew not which, was near;
And winnowed-out the foremost for our own.
I won a wreath for that.

The Blind Seer

But most of all
I lived with color. Color was my home.
Hours at a time I haunted, chin in hand,
The cloudy edges of old, battered cliffs;
Whence, body-prone, I scrutinized the sea.
I never wearied, watching. Hues were sounds
And sang to me: a breaking wave broke song
More beautiful than surge; the soaring trees
Made music for the modulating sun,
More perfect than the wind's on summer nights.
I walked, and echoes of faint colors flew,
Like snatches of sweet birds, from everywhere.
I dreamed, with half-closed eyes, and madrigals
Fell from the moon, or dwindled with the West.
I heard the flutings of anemones;
The blare of poppies in the sallow wheat;
And plucked rich major-chords of bliss
From trellised roses on the garden wall.
They took it all away. I lost my sight.

You've seen a flower pillaged from its place;—
Poor bruised-of-stalk!—its petals and bowed head
Plumbing the last abyss of abject woe:
I wonder if it blames the gods, as I;
Cries them unjust, and maledicts their world?
Most like. At any rate it dies. I lived.
First died, then lived: a sort of after-death,
A twilight before dawn, that was not death,
Nor, either, life. I felt as wounded do,

The Blind Seer

That see their bodies torn, and feel no hurt;—
Ill-fated houses, all their folk from home,
Gutted with ruin by marauding bands
Whom no one stays; while household gods look down,
From by the hearth-side, stolid, through the din.

Thus; many days. At length there smiled a dawn
When one emboldened breeze slipped past my sill
With perfumes in its arms, and trailing flowers.
I sniffed the spring; and lo, I lived again.
No more with just that loosing of great winds
To ride the world, which was my want before;
But in the quiet footpaths, step by step,
More mindful of each whisper by the way;
I walked.

Whether it was a something in my face,
A sadness with an afterthought of peace,
Or some serener purpose of the mind,
By pain imposed; I know not. But they came.
I could give help, it seemed, to multitudes.

You've entered, out of sunlight, a dark room,
And slowly yielded to its gentler rays,
Until, at last, what had been blind, you saw.
So I. They called it miracles of sight.
I gave them counsel once, when peril spoke,
That brought unlooked-for victory in lands
Where late our arms had crumbled. That was how

The Blind Seer

I won the title: "He who saved the state."
You've lived here long? You know the rest of me.

The tide should be at ebbing-point by now.
The wind is making: in an hour or more
The reef off yonder headland will be white.
I used to love it, when the sun was low.

TO HELEN

UNWINTRY winds wrought with the trees
Till I feigned of far-off seas
And a southern tongue;
And then, like a lake, the placid sky
Was all shaken, and broken; and so was I:
A bird having sung.

A bird; where fell no flute of song
Out of heaven the winter long,
And the dull world lay
A lover, lethargic, weary-worn
With too much denial, and too much of scorn,
And too deep delay.

The sky was shaken by that bird,
And the wind, and I; who heard
His high thrill of joy:
For out of that singing, suddenly, came
The whole vigor of summer, full-flushed, a flame
No death could destroy.

A man looked out on life so long,
He forgot his heart of song

To Helen

And his minstrel ways;
Till, just of a chance, a child went by,
And she questioned his face—he never knew
 why—
With a child's quick gaze.

She passed, but oh, she left behind,
 In his eyes, no longer blind,
 A heaven of blue.
She gave him, you see, his heart again,
With her look of a child, so puzzled at pain:
 Helen, it was you!

TO SONIA

"I kneel not to you, but to suffering humanity in you."—*Crime and Punishment*.

THERE are feet on the stones outside,
And laughter, and eventide,
This bud-break of May.

"I am lonely at dark," it reads:
For my sake?—how a hurt heart bleeds!—
Or wouldn't you say?

It were little enough to give,
Just once; to live and let live,
With love out of cage
One full breath . . . It is harsh to withhold.
The windows that sky-gleamed are gone lamp-gold;
Print blurs on the page.

Your room, with the shadows that fall
Just so, will be lighted, all
The corners curved in:
Will you use my chair, the full, ripe red?—
Or set it away from you, dead, stone dead?
What a devil's gin!

To Sonia

Not to wait, to-night as before,
 Watching you close the door
 And smile as you turned,
Is my width of penance. You used to sit down
With a tuck of feet and a twitch of gown
 That were better unlearned.

One wearies of bindings; the best
 Tree calf, with a hand-tooled crest,
 Will cheapen of charm:
What's leather to fondle? Finger-tips know
The worth and the warmth, the rich, rose-leaf glow
 Of an inside arm.

Will the heart run dry, as you say,
 With disuse? I know the gray
 At my temples is sign
Youth passes. Will spending renew me? Tears
Would not wash it, if life took your years
 To give me back mine.

"A strong man would take!" So you fling
 The taunt at me, challenging
 My strength with a fear.
Perhaps, if he willed. So might I,
If I willed . . . I am hungry; then why, why
 Stay a-fasting here?

I'll tell you. Shut eyes on a proud,
 Pale peak, and a breath of cloud,
 Dawned red into gold;

To Sonia

Or an ocean at moonrise, dimmed
In warm starlight, and then overbrimmed
 With a side-glance of cold.

Have you ever come flush on a spray
 Of arbutus, daft with May,
 In a city street?
Or heard a voice singing the windows wide,
From your sick-bed, haply, just as hope died,
 Forlorn, in defeat?

Not the fear you impute. I saw,
 Eyes-deep (You should call it awe),
 To the truth of you.
“I am lonely at dark,” it reads:
For my sake? How a hurt heart bleeds!
 I am lonely, too.

THE HINTERLAND

I CANNOT keep thee from my dreams,
However else I put thee by;
My frozen brooks are running streams,
When thou, in dreams, art once more nigh.

I wake with all defences down,
That were so hardly built by me;
Scarcely a single moated town
Remains unleveled to the sea.

I wake, and unlethargic know
The bitterness of banished pain;
Thy coming leaves me once more low,
I take thy loss to heart again

By this I know I am not king
Beyond one strip of sand and sea;
For inland are such folk as bring
Rebellious loyalty to thee.

Under a snow-clad mountain range,
Behind the bosom of the hills,
They dwell, and yield no hope of change
Such as the empty sea-coast wills.

The Hinterland

Thrice-girt in steel, to hold thee where
Thy loveliness less poignant seems,
Betrayed, my people strip me bare,—
I cannot keep thee from my dreams.

EPIGRAMS IN ABSENCE

I

TOO far my muezzin, exiled wanderer?
Fragrance of flowers, repeat my prayers to her.

II

The tapestry of twilight. Taper-high,
One planet. Who lit love in it? Did I?

III

I heard faint strings, a boat-load, on a lake:
Then quiet. I was gentle for your sake.

IV

Diana curved her maiden moon. A star
Bled light. So I bleed love. So youth's you are.

V

I passed a lighted doorway, at gray gloam.
A candle went upstairs. Were ours that home!

VI

The rays from that pricked point of midnight star
Reach me unhindered. Flies my love less far?

VII

Dark of the sky is wrung out in white rain.
So sorrow clouds and love makes clean again.

Epigrams in Absence

VIII

The ice has melted where the bridge bends low.
Our two lives crossed: my frozen currents flow.

IX

When you were near, I slept for love's sweet sake.
Now, being absent, pain and I awake.

X

Not as a bee, forgetful of a flower,
Think of me. But a tide, more stirred each hour.

XI

Talk. Talk. The wintry sun slants down the floor.
If you were here . . . They buzz on as before.

XII

The wintry iron yields: the leaden sky
Lights up. Can spring be waiting? Spring—and I.

XIII

Spring's in her early shyness, yet she stays
Each night just longer. So your smile delays.

XIV

Now, underfoot, cramped winter runs away.
For us that song-sparrow, Love, had much to say.

XV

Lost is the singing lark, at last, in sky.
I cannot speak; for loving you so high.

WHITE VIOLETS

TEARS that never quite touched earth,
 Passion-buds that lie
Stillborn of a fruitless birth,—
 Stars from a dead sky.

Not with purple pulses borne
 Down wild tides of play;
Ages since, an elfin horn
 Witched their youth away.

Blanced with their own beauty; pale,
 Much as maids might be,
Looking long for one soft sail
 Swallowed by the sea.

Much as they who, stooped with years,
 Listen all alone,
Hearing faint, through far-off ears,
 Voices they have known.

Children of too gentle birth,
 Here these flowers lie;
Love that never quite touched earth,—
 They . . . and thou and I.

TRISTAN TO ISEULT, ON THE SEA

LADY of liege, a fair wind follows after,—
A fair wind, to France;
Under our prow sleek billows bubble laughter,
And diamonds dance:
Scarcely the mast betrays a tilt of motion
'Twixt yon fleece cloud, and bosom-breathing
ocean;
The soft sea air spells heavy eyes, a potion
And a poppiéd trance.

Spring is in England now; the broom and heather
Will be fain to please;
Spring is in England now; fields run together,
And orchards are seas:
You must clap hand to note our England smiling;
Blowzed country lads, and lasses them beguiling;
And, all around, the blue-eyed sea enisling
Our England of ease.

Mark and his castle, eagle and his eyry,
Are aloof on rocks
Wraithed with sea mist, and lapped in sunsets fiery
Where the ocean knocks:
Mark, a stern man, but just and fair of dealing,

Tristan to Iseult, on the Sea

Takes of his own cliffs; blunt, ashamed of feeling,
Yet, here and there, in sunny nooks revealing
The flowers he mocks.

Holds the wind fair, England is ours to-morrow,
And our journey's end;
Would it were . . . well, there is always sorrow
For new joy to mend:
You will rejoice to hear the snuffed keel grating;
There will be jousts, and village masques, and
fêting;
Mark, with his henchmen, on the shingle waiting
For his bride—and friend.

I shall return, with speed, and spurs of glory,
To that kingly realm—
Arthur's, the Table Round; esteemed of story—
That like a broad elm
Branches to doughty deeds and rugged making:
Man must to horse, and ride; his earthly aching
Else will ride him; to horse, and battles breaking
Through a slitted helm.

Life is not bloomed from boys' and girls' believing;
There is more of pain;
Were it a whole, in warp and woof one weaving!
But the rifts remain.
All the brave cities ever laid in leaguer,
All have been lost, when I, a boy too eager,

Tristan to Iseult, on the Sea

Climbed; or were cloud-drift, without substance,
meager

As the moon's white rain.

Life . . . to be happy . . . were it so, then dying
Were indeed to die;

Life's to be lived, and stoutly, not with sighing . . .
How the westward sky,

Look! is a battlefield and lifting lances;

Day will be dearly sold ere night advances;

How that one star outrides them all, and prances
White-plumed . . . Were it I!

Thou wilt be held like unto distant singing,

An undying song

Men will recall with breaths of April, bringing

The violets along:

Thou wilt be whispered by the waves forever,

Out on sad shores, to those the tides dis sever;

Live and endure through all the world's endeavor,

A strength for the strong.

May it be thine; the quiet starlight, sifting

Through the leaves of life;

May it be thine; the tender twilight, drifting

Over day-long strife:

Be it to thee, thy gift, to hear, unspoken,

Things that a child, thy children, bring thee
broken;

Tristan to Iseult, on the Sea

Theirs to be healed of thee, a mother's token;
Be it thine . . . his wife.

Will there be where, I wonder, in hereafter,
The lost is regained?
Now the wind dies, and with it dies the laughter;
The West is still stained,
Pale, now, an ocean full of isles and dreaming,
Deep, tranquil bays, and limpid shallows gleaming;
Oh, to be there!—to find it real, not seeming,
And faith, unprofaned!

Lady of liege, a soul is but a sorrow.
It is best, I think. . . .
You will be his, and I shall ride, to-morrow . . .
Now, the first stars sink
Into their sleeping; so must thou; yet going,
Ere thou art gone, give me thine eyes, for showing
We were friends once; friends the one wind was
blowing,
And so . . . we did drink. . . .

PYGMALION TO GALATEA

WHEN you were dreamed, and marble, flake by flake,

In one mad smother of desire,
Chipped to your sweet lean flanks, and smoothed to round,

Taking your limbs' faint-thewed attire,

I loved you for your body's sake:

You gave not breath nor sound,
Nor did awake.

Then pain broke out in me, not pulse, I wis;

It fluttered in my throat, a bird

Wild as white light new-splintered from a star:

My spirit cried to you. You stirred;

You, the cool-veined as Artemis,

Not as, touched, now you are,—

Aglow, like this.

Yours was the choice; immortally to take

Allegiance of the ages, in cold line,

Or, like a blossom on an apple bough,

Take fire, ephemeral, and shine,

Shot through and through with life's heart

ache . . .

Death's in your body, now:

You are awake!

TO AN AMERICAN GIRL IN THE COSTUME OF
ANCIENT GREECE

Unwind, O bent-browed Earth, your golden skein!
 Phoebe is come again,
A shaft of moonlight shivering a glade;
Poised, with blind feet, and fillet of moth-flower braid,
 Bewildering the brain.

Seen glancingly. When eyes look clear of sound,
 And stilly she is found,
No longer plucking petals from the dance,
Then, flesh and blood, sweeter than old romance
 Of moon-drenched Grecian ground,

She's Spring!—white winter melting into May,—
 Dearer than yesterday;
A breathing girl of a yet lovelier land
Than burned its heart out on the rich sea sand,
 When red sails ashed to gray.

Straight as young pines, and like a sapling slender,
 True as the North, and tender;
Quick seed of old-world bloom that crannied here;
Thou are reborn, daughter of hearts austere
 Plighted in unsunder.

To American Girl in Costume of Greece

Thou art reborn: yet in thy young limbs glows
 Like blood as in Sappho's,
When her proud pulse impeached her: hands and feet
Thou hast, and ankles, as in fabled Crete
 Worked Ariadne's woes.

Repeated shape!—as on the pebbled shore
 The blue sea carves once more
A sister wave of the bold breed that flung
Round all the isles by leaf-stirred poets sung
 A star remove before.

In actual sunlight given; on the gray
 New England granite; say
What broken beauty drifts this sweet of song
Down sky and shadow, petal and bright prong,
 Even as yesterday. . . .

PENELOPE

I WONDER with what winds thou art, my own,
Under what skies and cloudy drift of stars;
Art thou at sea, I wonder, or at rest
In some sweet haven; dost thou lay thy head
Contentedly on rough, beweathered boards,
And art thou warm, my own, and dry?—for rain
Loves not the aged, and I fear for thee.
Thou wilt be coming home no more. I knew,
Always I knew, I was not widowed, when
Troy was a long while falling, and my king
Beleaguered her. And now, now thou art gone
A great way farther: I have dreams at night
That thou art sailing to the world's white end,
Even to where the sea is sea no more;
And in the mist I lose thee at the last.

Those early days!—I mind me well when thou,
Dark-eyed, a boy full of deep thoughts,
Inveigled me of love; we thought the world
Could be contained, the whole of it, in our
Young, tendril arms; when flowers dawned on us,
We deemed they were our kisses, and white clouds,
All deeply fragrant with the sunset, were
The promises we plighted o'er and o'er.

Rememberest, I wonder, how we found
Twin shells upon the sand? I have them yet:
We would be like them, never be but one,
Even in death. A kiss made sure of it.
Then came the scourge from Troy:—I saw thee go,
A shine of arms, beyond the wind-blown sea.

My beauty, like the moon, filled more and more;
And like a flower looking to the sun,
I held my heart to thee; and thou away.
It pained that I was youthful not for long,
And beautiful for none to fondle me,
Or dote upon my softness, as the wind
Creeps in from sea, over warm droves of flowers.
I could not peak and pine, lest thou return,
And find me faded . . . for I lived for thee:
But others came, pretending to my hand,
Sweet-spoken courtiers having honeyed lips
And garmented with praises for my eyes.
It pained that they should see my loveliness,
And find me worshipful, when he, the one
In all the world, my Lord, was blind of me.

At last, at last;—I mind me well the day:
Thou wast a tempest scurrying dead leaves,
And afterwards,—an autumn of calm sky;
We were so happy with each other's eyes.
But in the years I've seen it come for thee,
The old, old longing, never far away;

Penelope

I've watched thee, when thou knew it not, asleep,
Or dull before the fire; and I've seen
The sinews tighten to receive a blow,
And e'en beheld thee half rise up, to meet
Great captains coming to thy tent; or else,
A rift of sunshine on a wan, gray sea,
Remembrance of a glorious day of fight.

I knew that thou must go; thou art a man
Moulded for more than me,—a man whose name
Was pricked in stars before his birth, and now
Men give Ulysses to their sons to guide.
I knew that thou must go; thou art a man,
And all the privilege of accident
Is thine; thou art for deeds, blows, danger—death:
It is thy state to sue such bright emprise,
That in the dint o' it, either thou dost fail,
And dash to earth; or ride with perfect wings
Right in the stormy current of a star!
Thou art a man; I knew that thou must go.

I am a woman; often I have lain
All night, unsleeping, when the wind was out,
And hearkened to the sorrows of old times
Pleaded with tears that happened long ago;
The loves of other women and the pain
That love presumes; and rising with the dawn,
Have watched the surges whiten on the shore,
Ever and forever, wasting, without end.

I am a woman; half my life I live
On with the seasons, half . . . I do not know;
I seem to grope in ancient memories
The years have blurred upon with blinding rain;
I am a woman; more I cannot tell.

There will be no returning, yet I live
That I may go with thee, where'er thou art,
As I have ever gone, and lived, with thee.
Thou canst not sail so far beyond the rim
That I shall lose thee; always I shall be
Pale light, like dawn, upon a troubled sea,
And when the wind is soft, and south, 'tis I
Shall breathe on thee, and wanton with thy hair;
And in the darkness thou art not alone,—
My heart shall come to thee; and every day,
Once in the morning, once at evening, I
Will touch the sea that thou art sailing on,
And tell it to be kind to thee. Farewell!—
Into the sunset go, with sails of cloud,
A rose-leaf cloud; into the distance, till
The twilight swallow thee. My King! . . . fare-
well.

LIBRARIAN

LIKE sparks above a windy fire,
Stars in the dawn-draft drifted higher;
Deep-etched, the pines in distance grew
Clearer against the sky; then dew
Woke on the grass; a bold cock crew,—
And all the birds came, choir on choir.

I dressed, and as I turned the stair
The sunlight was already there;
The windy sky was washed with rain,—
A flash of gold the weather-vane;
In gray and green, along the lane,
The frisking willows loosed their hair.

That was this morning: not yet noon,
And I am back again—so soon.
This is the happy holiday,
The village folk are blithe and gay;
I was not happy there to-day,—
I found it strangely out of tune.

Often as not, when I am glad,
And fling myself on life, with mad,
Most eager merriment of eyes,

A veil of cloud creeps up the skies;
The wind turns cold; a woman sighs:
I laugh; but vainly—I am sad.

And so to-day: its joys, in view,
Woke me before the dawn came through.
I did my dreams of gaiety;
And they are done, and I am he
Who comes, unhappy, here, to be
Quiet, my old, old friends, with you.

ALL OTHER LOVES

OLD shadows, when the fire-light flickers on the
wall;
Old fancies, when the raindrops through the wet
leaves fall;—
All other loves begin too late, to own us all.

Her voice let down the bars of sleep and bade us go;
Her touch took tears away, her smile, made well our
woe;
The dearest refuge in the world was her “I know.”

She gave so much, past life and breath, to us who
came
Out of the clouds that wrapped her heart in sudden
flame:
She kissed us with her dreams and taught us, each,
his name.

Old fragrance of wet roses, on the garden wall;
Old songs of candle-light, through leaves wistfully
that fall;—
All other loves begin too late, to own us all.

INSPIRATION

LIKE some sweet day thou art, exceeding rare,
That after turbulent, October gales,
Floats on a pool of deep, enchanted air,—
A shallop rose-leaf with unfluttered sails.

A day on which the world, at war so soon,
Takes sacrament, putting its armor by;
Before pale winter rings again the moon,
And bitter snowflakes choke the tender sky.

Now, after hours with thee, as daylight dies,
And over oceans evening voices are;
White on my heart a singing pathway lies:
I leave thee, breathless, with thy gift—a star.

LITANY WITH THE EVENING STAR

THE STAR

LIFT up your hearts; the smoulder-thickened
sky
Flames to the thousand altars of the West:

THE PEOPLE

We lift them up; the vales of evening lie
Cool, and their shadows quiet us to rest.

O thou who givest to the purple sea,
And on the mountains utterest away;
Thou that with night dost whisper stars to be,
And art, with rose-buds, filled with dew; and day:

Thou whose wild feet are in the brimming tides
And windy chorals of insurgent spring;
(When flowers worship, and a true god hides
In every flutter of a wood-bird's wing:)

Thou that art deathless when the dead leaves go,
And huddled harvests grieve the dying year;
That bringest frost-light flying through the snow;—
Sleigh bells,

Litany with the Evening Star

And happy hearthsides;
 hear!
 oh, hear!

By what thou tellest to the little streams
That filter downward to a far-off sea;
By what the robin learns of thee, that dreams
Her nest and brood, swayed in an apple tree:

By the sweet sense that makes the crocus rise
Long ere the winter rushes out in rain;
By all the wonderment that lives and lies
In buds of April bursting forth again:

By moth wings, and the modesty of pearls,
And shell tints inexpressible and dear;
By sleep-blown children pillowed on their curls,—
By all thy gentleness,
 we pray thee,
 hear!

For those who suffer, underneath the sky,—
(Poor pensioners of pain, that crave surcease!)
For women in their travail tears that lie;
For beds of fever parched and out of peace:

For those who toil to keep alive a spark,—
(Poor pittancers with porringers of lead!)
For wolfish eyes and hunters in the dark;
And souls that shrivel ere a child is fed:

Litany with the Evening Star

For all frail flesh that follows foolish ways,—
(Poor penitents that sicken and are sere!)
For lonely midnights and insipid days;—
(Poor parted lovers!)

we beseech thee,
hear!

And we beseech thee, let our prayers uphold
Young men who come to battle unafraid;—
Who plunge with ardor in the world's keen cold:
Proof thou their spirits like a tempered blade!

We crave thee, look with tenderness on those
Who drink deep reveries with far-off eyes;
Oh, send thy pity when a sunset glows
On poets reft of utterance by skies!

Hover on those who, voiceless, have not sung,
Yet, being earth-bound, tremble to be clear,
And climb to thee on beauty, rung by rung;—
Hear us, and help them,

we beseech thee,
hear!

Shrive us for looking with too narrow gaze;
For judgment when we knew not what was just;
For envy, and unhonorable dispraise;
For hatred,

and hard-heartedness,
and lust.

Litany with the Evening Star

Guard us from vapors of low-vaulted night,
On evil-smelling bat wings that embark;
From fierce invasion and slow-moving spite;
From guiltiness,

from terror,

from the dark!

Spare us to lift sweet eyelids when the dew
In individual stars divides the day;—
When birds break out, and winds are coming
through;

Spare,

and be young with us!—

spare us,

we pray!

Go, now, in peace; the sable-hooded sky
Stoops to the waning altars of the West:

We go, in peace, the lanes of evening lie
Hushed, and their shadows lead us down to rest.

EUCHARIST

THIS is the brink, the valley without sound;
Deep, where no pebble trickles to the ground;
The cloudiest abyss,
Abruptest precipice;
Too wide to leap, yet narrowing so near,
Love listens over it. The brink is here.

The fumes of poppied slopes here fall away;
Music is broken on these peaks; here they
Come, who were star-drawn down
To brooks, and dreamed to drown,
But thirsted hither; thin these airs so fine,
Heart falters me. Christ passes . . . Bread and wine . . .

Is loving so aloof? O cleanse with light
My eyes: Lord, that I might receive my sight!
It cannot ever be
That life is devoid of Thee,
That here alone, one honey drop, Thou art;
Remote, high essence, from the world's great heart?

No!—very distillate here; like a clear note—
Darkened with raindrops—from a leaf-fringed throat;
Printed like violets' veins

The wounded sky ingrains;—
April's remembrance, sweetened with her tears,
Shy with defeat of all the entombing years.

Here quiet, like stilled music, sharpens earth and sky
Into intense atune; here fall and die,

Faintly and far away,
The wind and the wild spray;

As when a door is closed on boisterous weather,
And ticking time and silence creep together.

Love is at poise here, petaled ecstasy
Prisoned between two heart-beats, lonelily.

But lift the bronze door's ring . . .

Love is a different thing,
And suddenly goes forth, in candle smoke,
To the broad day; as if great winds awoke.

Love, I have dreamed of fen-foul battlefields,
Littered with death no twinkling foliage shields,—

The fly-blown flower of hate

Sprawling and spatulate,

And felt a sweetness, I knew not from where,
Putting the poison by, and thou wast there.

And I have traced thee, windowed in the eyes—

Like sunset—of half-desperate youth (O wise,

To whom a hurt heart bleeds

Courage and haughtier deeds!)

Eucharist

And tracked thy camp-fires on the hills, when pain
Sickened me through, and smiled and fought again.

Hapless we be, luffing and rudder-lost,
Like leaves upon a haunted wood-pool tossed.

Were it that Love came not,
We drowned and were forgot:
Blown beyond years, soon failed our feeble spark,
From star to star so deep it is, and dark.

As readers know a shadow on the page,
Yet wake not from their pleasant pilgrimage,
Living, we are aware
Of an unearthlier air,
Where branches bend with not a breath behind,
And clouds blot moons away, and slow wings grind.

Some midnight tryst, too terrible to know,
Menaces all, and Love must rise and go:
Into my dreams the dread
Follows me, safe in bed,
Until the rumor of that going dies
Into brave dawn. O Love, beyond what skies?

Some tethered ugliness frays loose; some power
Footprints the unspoiled meetness of an hour;
Perverse, a proud look trips
The marriage of ripe lips;
Into the air the dice of death are tossed;—
Is it cold luck?—some luckless child is lost.

Alas!—poor children, strayed upon the path
Of some far-going, eyes-uplifted wrath,
 That reckons not at all
 Of where its shod hooves fall,
They perish, with their glimmers of sweet fire,
Stamped out upon a blasphemous black mire.

And we, explorers pale, grope through the dark,
From tree to tree; slow-fingering the bark,
 Tilting our lantern light;
 To read what there may write . . .
A king's writ runs, this twilight width of land:
Token, the blood-prints of a piercèd hand.

A King's writ runs: our net-work sorrow drains
Deep of the gladness in the young year's veins,
 And all lost loveliness
 Greens like a willow tress.
A golden bird-song shaken from a bough?
Yea, and a thunder in the stars art thou!

A bit of broken water by the way,
My poor heart is; yet look in it, I pray,
 Love, that it straight may be
 All sky-rejoiced with thee.
Just now a whisper, floated past the brink,
Troubled me dark. It was the dead, I think.

AS IT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING

SET in a niche of living rock, I stand;
And thou art with me; we two, side by side:
Behind us is a neck of narrow land;
Before us foams, in cruel swales, the tide.

No room is here for querulous debate,
For disputatious tongues, or broken ban;
Life is the issue; thine, my woman mate,
And mine, thy comrade and thy rough-thewed man.

I kneel not, in idolatry of stone;
Yet thou art precious, more than pelf or pride:
Thy nearness is my panoply, alone;
I thirst for battle, thou against my side.

I thirst for battle, and it comes; the deep
Gives up Goliath, one, huge, frowning wave.
Dark, that roars over us; thunders, that sweep . . .
I feel thee, thou art with me, I am brave!

A PATHWAY TO THE STARS

A SHIP in doldrums, dripped the weather-vane,—
Bereft of wind its gallant sails of gold;
The morning snow had weakened into rain,
And rain turned drizzle by late afternoon,
And now came evening on, and like a swoon,
Out of the sea a slow miasma rolled.

Close to the walls it clung, and blurred away,
Like beetling crags, their dizzy slopes of fire;
Near to the ground it crept along, and lay
Coiled-up for passers-by, or swayed enthralled
Before bright windows, or, reminded, crawled
Its loathsome length above the beaten mire.

The yellow street-lamps swam like moons gone pale
Behind blown cloud; the river whistles were
A moan of baying monsters on the trail
Of some doomed quarry, questing in the dark.
Such nights smear moss on tombstones, and black
mark
Cold chapel walls, and make death dismal.

Where two streets joined, out of the murk, forlorn,
Unheralded, they came. Hatless was she,

A Pathway to the Stars

Ill-kempt, slack-shod, her garments shabby-worn.
His arm fast locked, she leaned and with her eyes
Searched his: her lips spelled Paradise.
A little, dingy city-bred was he.

So they passed on, adown that sodden street,
Together, in sweet, isolate disdain;
And so the mist closed in behind their feet
Who went so foolish-free of all delight
Through that amazing, pitiless, foul night;—
Two moon-mad lovers in a country lane.

Oh, high-born stoics!—they had burst the bars,
And dwelt deliberate with freedom; they
Trod the true path, drinking not clouds but stars:
Souls and not raindrops danced before their eyes,
And in their train a wind blew butterflies. . . .
They passed, and lo—the walks were white with May.

FOR THE DEDICATION OF A TOY THEATER

YOU banished fairies and lean outlawed elves,
Immured in dusty books on closet shelves;
You exorcised young spirits that have lain,
Cooped up with cobwebs, in a cynic's brain;
You goblins and good fellows, mischief mites
That drank the cream and teased the dog, o' nights;
You godmothers; you witches on old brooms;
You prancing princes (coal-black hair, and plumes),
Maidens, magicians, ogres, Jacks-in-vines,
Con your enchantments, furbish up your lines,
Make ready for revival—not so fast!—
You shall be summoned when the play is cast.
And you, grown old too early, you whose eyes
Have lost the wonder of the truly wise;
You scoffers armed with “science” and a laugh,
Who know the world and scorn the better half;
You, also, looking backward with regret,
Who catch some glimmers of late childhood yet;
And you who never wandered, skimped indeed,
Beyond the borders of the hard world's need;
But most, you children, holding in your hearts
The ways of highest heaven, best of arts,
Be seated here. Yon curtain is the mind:
Let logic slip, and—laughter is behind.

For the Dedication of a Toy Theater

Ay, laughter, and brave deeds, and hopes come
true,—

The old sweet world of fancy, made for you.
But mark you, disenchantment's nigh at hand;
Whoever questions will not understand.
Look to't: and, as you love us, we entreat,
Put off your cares; a smile will buy your seat.
Ho! actors! come, make ready there within;—
Have up the curtain; let the play begin!

THE HOUSE THAT WAS

WHO art thou, ghastly creature, grinning clown;
Imbiber of clear death, the ecstasy
Of horror, newly shoveled from the grave?
What irks those burned-out craters, once were eyes?—
(They stare so steadfast) and that beetled brow,
What roofs it that it wrinkles-on so long?
And wherefore teeth? Thou canst not swallow
food;
Nor hast a tongue to savor with. A dog
Might sniff some virtue in thee, thou rank skull.
There is not; nay!—thy virtue is to rot!
They turned thee out for that.

It is not long,

Not very long ago, new-born, a babe,
Thou wast warm-pillowed on a mother's breast;
Lulled with the lift and droop of it, to sleep,
And blinking puzzled eyes for that the sun
Made friends with thee, a fellow citizen,
When thou didst fall awake at last, to be
One with the wide world, hungry, with reaching
hands.

There was a window, doubtless, near the dawn,
Where summer mornings looked at thee and smiled,

The House That Was

And bird songs, far away, and crowing cocks
Mingled with sleep, till, happy, drowsy-eyed,
Thou wast awake once more, with dewy grass
And petals of closed flowers, and precious winds
From over seas, that said farewell to stars.

Long evenings waned for thee; and ere thou slept
The moon could rise, new-floated, from the trees,
And set thee sailing down long tides away,
Before the twilight ended thee farewell,
Or thou hadst lifted anchor to the dark.
And storm there was, in hours when trees awake,
With touches of strong wind that loosed old pain
And comforted itself with tears: then thou
Heardest, half soothed, and half in very awe,
The rush of torrents in the thirsty leaves;
And drowsy benisons of priestly rain.

It must be, when the sun set southward, low,
And frosty nights turned all the meadows brown,
Thou lookedst into heaven, dull, dark and cold,
And wast in raptures that a snowflake fell,
Forerunning winter, in thy hollowed hand.
Nay, surely, thou didst find the first far wings
Of northward swallows, when the fast-locked ground
Broke open to the lustiness of spring,
And little leaves were thrusting-points of joy;—
When long-forgotten fragrances once more
Entered the gateways, trooping, like young girls,
And, arm in arm, the songs of summer came.

The House That Was

Thou wast a boy ere childhood wept for thee,
And bathed in brooks or wallowed in warm hay;
Far, windy hill-tops beckoned thee to go
Beyond them, flaming, full of western gold,
And down long lanes, however swift thy feet,
Thy dreams flew faster, shadowed with blown cloud.

Betimes thy boyhood fell from thee; a lad,
Thou didst no more pluck happiness, alone
On unfrequented feeding-slopes of joy;
But soughtest-out thy fellows, and wast found
With young, gruff voices, emulous to lead.

Thus far we follow thee: then thou dost go—
A brook abashed for leafy sanctities—
Into green depths of murmurous surmise.
Only we hear thy music, afterwhiles,
A little space, thy laughter, dying down
To distance, fringed-on with blown sighs
And far-borne voices from a lonely hill.
Dying?—thou art gone.

We know no more;
Save, somewhere, under stars, when twilight fell,
Thy full course led thee, brimming, to the sea,
And lost thee there. Brown skull, we know no more.
And yet, it may be, piecing here and there
Our dreams of thee, we may bloom back again
Some semblance of an old time certitude,—
The sunset light of what thy noon-days were.

The House That Was

Thou wast a man, and didst drink life, not ease.
The man thou wast most certainly did stand
Face-forward in the open fields of fight:
Thou hast been seaward like a rocky wall
And felt the grinding thunder at thy gates,
When oceans stirred: thy battlements besieged
Have weathered-out the cruel cannon quake,
The crushing stone and sickening, barbed hail:
Thou art all smooth with searching winds of fate.

Who turned thy face against the multitude,
And set thee in the shadow of defeat?
Why didst thou stand mid-current of them all,
And lift thine eyes to perilous, proud ways?

In autumn twilight 'twas thy wont to turn
Across the fields, and leave thy toil behind;
Plodding the stubbled furrows where the ground
Was caked and dry with sun and little rain,
And breathing smoke-drift from a brushwood pile
Some woodsman built and covered with dry leaves;
And often, then, the sky burned up in flame
That smoldered down through glories of heaped
cloud,

To leave at last, in rifts, a molten star.
Thy heart burned also, doubtless, with strong pain
For beauty that it loved, and could not stay;
And wonder stirred within thee, as if winds,
Long sleeping through the night, remembered dawn.

The House That Was

And when, some March-bewildered afternoon,
The sun warmed out on rivulets of rain,
And showed the speckled snow, washed, here and
there,
From patches of bare ground where Earth gaped
through,
Brown as a gypsy tattered without shame,
Thou didst exult to breathe the homely sward,
And smell the grass, pale, trampled—but alive.
And sometimes, in sharp winter, on a hill
Well fledged with somber firs, against clear sky,
The wind blew snow-dust on the frosted snow,
And leaning back for breath, hands over ears,
Thou wast caught up in one sheer rush of joy,
And laughed for living.

There were other times . . .
How many weary hours hast thou starved through,
With not one spark of jubilant, sweet fire?
No doubt thou didst go singing in the rain,
And trudged on gaily through the driving snow;
But elsewhere there were days with thee, too utter sad
For any singing; days when winds had died,
And hollow mists shut heaven's breath away:
Days in the ruck of winter, when the snow,
All mired with wheels, lay rotting in the roads,
And nothing came, and no one sang along,
And only out of window were wet trees,
Or sodden snow, or clothes upon a line.

The House That Was

What bore thee on, confronting that gray sky,—
That tedious path and pitiless, blind rain?
What urge of patience held thy weary prow
Against the hollows of that homeless sea?

A ringing axe puts edge into the blood:
Is't fancy?—was it thine to swing stout strokes
Upon the bodies of big, burly trees,
And open clearings with their crashing fall;—
To lop the boughs, and sled the log-wood home?
It was; thou didst; oh, surely, old, brown skull.

On many a morning smelling of mild spring,
We picture thee a-plowing, thy two hands
Held hard on handles, guiding the clean share;
Down field and back, not checking save to turn,
Or lift a root that hindered thee; and then,
Back against tree—for comfort, not for shade—
With knife and loaf and water-jug of stone,
Making the mid-day meal with quiet mind.

Not long; for down a windy afternoon
We see thee plowing still, with chirp and whoa,
Till shadows lengthen, and the sun dips down
And leaves clear light to dwindle into stars.
Ah, then, unhitching from the plow the team,
Straight-backed at last, with eyes above the ground,
How happy in thy weariness thou art;
And how the dusk adds welcome to thy door!

Was it thy strength, thy sinews and hard hands,
That made thee tremble when the south winds blew?

The House That Was

It seemed a trumpet stirred in some far land,
And set thy blood up-answering in flame;
A rally call and reveille that sang
Beyond the world, a thousand years ago:
That sighed and left thee fainter than before.

Once more we dream: late April is it now.
Late April is it; under last year's leaves
The mayflower hides, and yellow marigolds
In oozy meadows lavish, like the sun,
Their smiles and laughter, clothed-on with clear joy.
Now every silence is run sweet with streams,
And gurgle notes that scatter into song
From boughs faint budding for the lips of May;
Now windy shadows quicken, and the light
Is blown too high to tremble-out with day,
But lingers to slow stars, and frogs set free
Of old brown marshes wrinkled to the moon.

Late April is it; down the windy lane
And through the wall thou art, with afternoon
And April—and a maid; but only her,
Not afternoon or April, heedest thou—
So sweetly at thy side she is, so dear—
But only her thou heedest, till, just where
The meadow rims, in one gray ledge of stone,
Down sitting at her side, a shyness falls.
Thou dost not hear the brisk-blown junipers,
That stir; the far off cry and answer call
Of scouting crows; the west wind in the grass:

The House That Was

Thou hearest only how thine own two ears
Are beating panic, nor dost trust thine eyes
The venture now so desperate to be done.

Late April is it, and late afternoon;
Along the lane the shadows are unflowed;
A planet walks the hill, and in the sky
The wind blows violets and April green.
Thou heedest not nor heedeth she, at all,
Home-wending, save of eyes.

Where are they gone,
Blind skull; those eyes?—and where indeed is now
Their sacrificial fire? Down what pale west
Of sloping stars, with what doomed winds were they
Sent flickering; those torches of delight?

Death lives in silence, ever; not a sound
Of all thou spakest once is left in thee
As in old, ivied walls there lives again,
On windy nights, the wassail and sharp song
Of times 'long buried and burned out in flame.
Where are they gone; thy wonderful wild words?—
Thy whispers, broken, and thy pleadings—where?

Still thou art silent; desolate thou art;
And is there none of all that sang in thee?
Almost it seems thou art, as once, here gone
Through goldenrod and aster, under leaves
Heart's blood incarnadined. Not long thy feet
Have crushed this moss, this fallen log not long

The House That Was

Has shredded with thy coming; down the glade
It almost seems thy head and shoulders are.
And this same sadness, surely, was thine too,—
Of haze and hilltop and brown, heaped-up grain,
And solemn hush as if old battles were,
A breath might rumor of; one breath too far
Beyond the hills to rumble now of war,
But still remembered and still waited for.

On such a day, we dream, thou wentest down,
Through woody shadows out on open fields,
Child's fingers in each hand. A tumbled wall,
A lane, more woods, a turnpike, farmyards—then
The quiet village and the village green,
In silence of sweet sabbath soothed with bells.

There in the meeting-house thou sattest down,
Straight-backed and grave beyond thy children's ken,
Who loved the slanted windows—leaking sky
And dusty chestnut leaves and locust song—
More than the preacher and his deep-toned prayer.
Through all the sermon thou wast still the same,
Hearing of life hereafter, heaven and hell,
Of righteousness and judgment and the pains
That follow closely on all evil done.

Returning over fields, sedate and slow,
Hands behind back, thy children out before,
It must be thou didst breathe, oh, surely, some
Old, pagan joy of fallows, and wide fields

The House That Was

Stacked stiff with grain; of free, soft sky
And children's voices, Indian-ambushing.
It must be, too, the sadness of the time,
The fade of autumn sparing not its hand,—
Of death foreshadowed and not far, prevailed,
And somewhat cried in thee.

Oh, surely, thou
Didst dread to die; to let warm life turn pale
And in thy lips be kissing-bright no more.
Surely there came of thee a pagan prayer
For one deep draught of such a depth in joy,
Oblivion should not blemish it nor time
Set down in dust of bitterness, to die:—
One spark of beauty beaten beyond pain;
One breath of flowers that not just mortal are.

Of what chimed seas on what enchanted shore
Art resonant, thou empty shell, that art
So naked hollow, hearing now no more?
From what gray dawning on a sightless sea
Didst thou set sail? What winds of prophecy
Went with thee,—who prepared thy prow;
By what pale stars who steered thee, moving on
Through dreaming twilights for unfathomed years?

There was a whisper in thy heart, a song
Older than time, younger than break-of-day;—
The voice of winds in tree-tops before dawn;
Of children, laughing over fields, in June;

The House That Was

Of rain on roofs, at nightfall; or soft waves
Down wet, brown beaches, sighing back to sea;—
Of beauty touched with lips . . . and lost again.

What went from thee that heard? What echoes died
In thy deep caves; what ecstasy arose
From thy so silent peaks, and soared in sky?
Out of thy listening, what throated bird;—
From thy still pools, what bubbles of drowned song?

Thou art as silent as untroubled strings,
Long mute, a master sang upon; as calm
As a faint, forest lake, where winds have gone away.
Thou art a rock dead oceans wrestled with,
And left forever, channeled with their flame,
For winter snows to sleep with, and chill sky.

And yet, there is a sound in thee, cold skull,
Too cobweb-thin for ears, too frail to die.
Such sound as follows singing, when a bird
Has fluted once and flown, and sings no more:
Such sound as breathes out petal sighs that fall
When stars touch roses, or a late moon strays
Through sleeping gardens of the long ago.

Over that arching brow how tenderly
Does time turn back; with what reluctant feet
The wasting seasons pause and pass it by.
How reverent the sunlight is, with those
So empty eyes; how lovingly the gloom
Fills the bare vaults where beauty burned away!

TO THE VERY TENDER CRESCENT MOON

PRECIOUS in incompleteness,—
Of such surpassing sweetness
As dreams are drawn upon!
A baby's sigh;
A white moth's thigh;
The lift of lids that flutter
On love too faint to utter;
Slim maiden, soon
Made wife, slim moon,
In your exceeding fleetness
All youth is summed and gone.

IDYL

I HEAR the humming of a swarm of bees
Trailing the honey through the cherry trees,
Whose petaled blossoms break like foaming seas
On misty shores of faraway;
And ever, through my idle, open door,
Sweet scents of morning myriadly pour;
Summer, just breathing, sleeps upon the floor;—
The year is Youth, the month is May.

Sweet Musidora, with your Gypsy hair
And eyes of sudden shadow, where, oh, where
Is there a forest glade so fitting fair,
To hold you as you are, to-day?—
When all the little leaves are spread for you,
And all the blossoms lift a head for you,
And every dew-drop is unshed for you?—
Say, if you know one; say, oh, say!

One moment, silent, looking very wise,
She ponders me; the next, with dancing eyes,
She takes my hand, and out of doors she flies.
The garden and the orchard first;
A stretch of high-road, then a broken wall;
A pathway over fields, the rise and fall

Of fallows; then—a thicket, and the tall
Aisles of a minster, green-immersed.

Here, if ever, Musidora, is the place,—
(I pillow me on moss, with upturned face,
And through the foliage just dimly trace
White clouds and darling stains of blue)
To put all mask and mystery behind,
And be like children, met with open mind.
(The leaves are singing overhead, the wind
Is after them) I will: will you?

A peal of laughter: can it be?—I look,
To find myself, the cause of it, forsook,
And Musidora, barefoot, in a brook.

This is your answer, then, arch maid?
No sooner seen than done; off hose and shoon!
(Brook water frolics to a lively tune:
The boughs bend low, the leaves are whisper-
strewn)

I am a child, and you? (We wade.)

ONCE UPON A TIME

THEY told me beauty was all, long ago,
Lived out and sealed in cerements of cold
time;

Tombed with sad obsequies, wept and laid low,
Beyond the reach of subsequent renown:
The age of gold, they said, had spent its prime,
Once; and forever after, blown sublime,
In one long sunset hopelessly went down.

They told no truth, for as bright flowers decline,
And leave pale ghosts for winds to waft away,
Beauty but breathed, and lo, like Proserpine,
Their gloomings vanished, suddenly, in air:
Beauty but breathed, once, gently, half in play,
And now I know there is no yesterday
Where beauty breathes; time is not tasted there.

I celebrate no fount whose waters flow
From sacred hill-slopes, haunted of old rhyme
Since raptured Helicon burst out below,
And Aganippe matched the Hippocrene
Impatient Pegasus struck forth from slime;
But a mere brook in no heroic time,
Flowing through meadows full of early green.

Once Upon a Time

Nor sing I, as did shepherds, piping praise,
Of nymphs they startled, featly, by a stream,
At top of noon, when flocks were left to graze;—
Haply a herdsman, seeking out some shade,
In reverie the while, half thought, half dream;
Who saw, then luckless lost, in one white gleam,
The naked shoulders of no mortal maid.

The brook I sing has no such deities,
But white of cloud and dark of end-of-day;
Its willows weep no broken threnodies,
Over its pebbles flute no pipes of Pan;
Yet lovely is, no less: the lips of May
Bend to its brink, and all along its way
A new song opens where each ripple ran.

Here you and I, one day, spring-wandering,
Came, through the fields, the sun was hot, and
 high;
And laughing, all alone, nor parleying,
Doffed hose and shoon, a very girl and boy,
To try (we knew, but still, we had to try)
Whither it went and whence it came—and why;
And lost, at once, the purpose in the joy.

A falling tree had bridged a quiet pool;
You perched on it, and swung a searching toe,
Just reaching, just—oh, bliss—the waters cool,
While I (you urged) went boldly overside

Once Upon a Time

Into brave depths: then, straightway, must we go
Where rapids called us, out of sight, below,
And revelled all the way there, through the tide.

A very girl and boy; so went our play,
And never thought between us, once, there fell
(We were as young as shadows, and as gay)
Of how we looked, or what we said—or wore,
Till, sudden, turning; why, I cannot tell—
I walked not earth but fields of asphodel—
A wind blew heaven wide; I passed the door.

Marble and bronze have great artificers
Touched into startled likeness of their dreams,
And left a few, unaging visioners
To hold forever, faintly, from afar,
To some lost beauty trailing off its beams
Beyond the silence, and the sound of streams,—
The last, thin radiance of a fallen star.

Singers have been who caught the drifting fire;—
Some low-born boy impoverished of gold,
Who trembled past the outposts of desire,
And uttered, in his crescent-moonèd strain,
Imperishable secrets of untold,
Unearthly blisses raining down from old,
Forbidden sanctities of vanished pain.

But living beauty, beauty breathing-on,—
No chisel questions it, no pale lips rim:

Once Upon a Time

Dear God!—to see you where the wind had gone,
All in soft shadow, still as Paradise,
Knee-deep, and lifting from the water's brim
Your looped-up garments . . . Star-eyed seraphim
Came down and kissed you, kneeling, with their
eyes.

You never knew; two heart-beats long, no more,
I worshipped—yet, eternities were they:
You stirred, I woke, we frolicked as before.
You never knew what light was in your hair,—
What rush of rapture caught my soul away;
But I—I know there is no yesterday
Where beauty breathes; time is not tasted there.

TO AN OLD FAMILY SERVANT

DEAD?—but I cannot think it; he who wore
His livery of smiles undimmed to sight;
Our childhood's fellowship who kept, of right;
Whose loyalty . . . no belted earl had more.
He stood so often at the stable door,
Lifting his lantern, signaling "Good night!"—
To follow me half home with friendly light:
I cannot think . . . he never failed before.

Yes, it is I who stand, good friend of years,
Blinded with shadow, where your footfalls fell;
To cast the glimmer of my childhood's tears
Beyond the dark, beyond the funeral bell,
Beyond the silence; I—God grant he hears—
Who lift the lantern, now: good-night!—farewell!

TO A WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

NOT to the near thou singest, bird
Of the cold northern skies;
Far-called thou art, a voice unheard
Speaks, and thy wakeful heart is stirred,
And in like key replies.

Beyond the breath of balsam pine,
And lakes where startled loon
Echo from cliffs that cool the shine
Of daybreak, or in coves combine
With wolves to haunt the moon:

Beyond the dip of paddles; where
No lighted tent can be;
Beyond the smoke of birch, to bear
Clean fragrance through still twilight air,—
There is that calls to thee.

Thou answerest, and art again
Made eager to reply;
Like children down a country lane
Calling at parting, each one fain
To blow the last good-by.

To a White-Throated Sparrow

Rapt singer, in thy sharpened ken
 There trembles a dim word;
Thou hearest what is hid from men,
Thou art divine, a dreamer, then—
 Only a brown-backed bird.

PSYCHE

THERE'S a softness in her eyes as of stars in
spring;

In her voice there runs the ripple of low streams;
There's the wonder in her glances of the moon's
imagining,

And her ways are like the flutter of late dreams.

I have seen her in her going to the wells at dawn,
When her feet were taking kisses from cool grass;
I have heard her bring her laughter, with the twi-
light, up the lawn,
And the sound was falling wine-drops in clear
glass.

Through the years' gray drift and sorrow she comes
eternal still,
With the old, old breathless music in her eyes:
Could a hand be stretched to hold her? . . . I am
left a lonely hill,
And a golden, darting swirl of butterflies.

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS

WHEN the wind blows, Thisbe, from a soft, south
land,
And the eyes of sleeping summers dimly stir;
I am minded of a maiden with an idle, out-stretched
hand,—
She is calling, and I follow, follow her.

When the wind blows, Thisbe, over roofs of rain,
And the withered leaves are scattered from the
limb;
There rides a reckless spirit on the whirling weather-
vane,—
He is calling, and I follow, follow him.

Oh, but when the wind blows, Thisbe, through my
door,
And I open to a moon upon the sea;
'Tis a voice of flame that fills me, crying, "Youth!—
forevermore!"—
And I follow, and I follow—follow thee.

AFTER A THOUSAND YEARS

THOU knowest not: yet the warm white clover
Fills with the song of sun-browed bees,
And ships are weighing, the wide-world over
To lift bright foam on forgetful seas.
Thou knowest naught of the south wind's freight-
ing,
Tossed in the far-off surge of trees;—
Of sailor's hope, or lover's waiting:
Unborn, thou knowest naught of these.

What will avail to thee, not yet hearing,
Rumors of lovers steeped in sighs;
Of deep, deep kisses, warm and endearing,—
Of red lips ripened, or downcast eyes?
What will bring home to thee, not yet living,
The joyful hazard of life's emprise;
The leap of heart in the throes of giving
All, to the utmost, prodigal-wise?

Thow knowest naught of sea winds, soft breathing,
Or inland pastures of fertile loam
With bright, young blades from the stalk unsheath-
ing,
And nibbled roots where the white flocks roam:

After a Thousand Years

Naught are to thee the whispering heather,
And orchards billowed in fragrant foam;—
Naught the long light, and the golden weather,
Clear, to the tip of its azure dome.

Even as when the ebb tide is turning,
Round the smooth stairs the current is still,—
Lap-full with stars, no longer yearning
To hurry seaward for good or ill;
So will the dawn, just ere it wake thee,
Pause to take breath on the topmost hill;
Then into life it will plunge, and take thee;
Then thou wilt drink, to the very fill.

Light-footed, fleet, through sky-covered places;
Prone on the earth, wearied-out with play;
Running companions immortal races;
Fighting world battles in fresh, warm hay:
Knee-deep in trenches of sand, on beaches;
Following brooks through a summer's day;
Lost to the world, down cool, green reaches . . .
All will be thine, in its own sweet way.

Now . . . thou art not; with unthought-of flowers,
And undreamed moonlight, perilous as wine;—
With languid noons, and golden, soft showers,
And sudden shivers of shade and shine
A woman's hair makes, while she reposes;—
With songs unsung, and beakers divine

After a Thousand Years

Full of unquaffed youth, starlight, and roses
Thou that art not, all these shall be thine.

Thou knowest not: yet the warm, white clover
Fills with the drone of sun-drenched bees,
And ships are sailing the wide world over,
Bitted with foam, on forgetful seas.
Thou knowest naught of the precious freighting
Coming ashore in the surge of trees;—
Of summer's hope, and winter's waiting:
Unborn, thou knowest naught of these.

FOR YOUTH

O WORLD full of years, that yet art youthful forever,

Wrinkled and yare;

O world full of hearts that find in a day's endeavor

Too much to bear;

O world, for the dreams that life so soon will dis-
sever,

Receive our prayer.

The children;—oh, give them fields, knee-deep in soft
grasses,

Wherein to hide,

Wherein may be sprawled a length while Hunting-
Blind passes,

And where abide

Tall daisies of June, and clumps of cloudy-haired
lasses,

Wonderful-eyed.

Beguile them with gnarly-limbed trees, and fruit that
beseeches

Robbers to raid;

For Youth

Allure them down brooks, and out on pebbly
brown beaches,

Featly to wade;

Brings pools full of fish, and woods with Robin-
Hood reaches,

For outlaws made.

Incite them with metes and bounds and a buried
treasure

Some pirate chief

Pent up and forsook, for their particular
pleasure;—

Some swarthy thief,

Tattooed with crimes, and sailing the sea at leisure,
Till a coral reef

Supplied retribution . . . leave the children the
fancies

Men have outgrown:—

White petals invoked for sooth, and fluffs, for
romances

Breathlessly blown;

That swales in the grass, and rings, are relics of
dances

By fairies sown;

That winds in the woods are words and whispers of
wonder;

Things that they knew

Long since, and forgot; and waves, when seas full
of thunder,

Breaking they brew,
Are counsellors:—leave them the faith that lies
under

All that you do.

Needs must that our bread be bought by dint and
endeavor,

With blood, and sweat;
It needs that our eyes be clear, that our hands be
clever

The gain to get;
'Tis well that we heed, well that we travail for-
ever,

And yet . . . and yet . . .

COLLEGIAN

LONG, long twilight, the indolent end of day;
Voices like vagrances, drifting, the fragrances
Sweet, of a song, are astray;
Lights bloom, window by window, while
We dream our dreams: shall we go?
Presently, presently; we will go presently;—
When we get ready to go-o,
When we get ready to go.

Moon-blown, over the blossoms the late winds die;
Out of the shadows the brooks in the meadows
Run full of stars from the sky;
Deep sleep waits, like a melody
Humming and happy and low:
Presently, presently; we will go presently;—
When we get ready to go-o,
When we get ready to go.

Far down under the rim of the cold, blue sea,
Wonderful cargoes beset by embargoes
Wait for such skippers as we;
Bright eyes, wealth, fame and families
Wait: shall we fare for them? No!
Presently, presently; we will go presently;—
When we get ready to go-o,
When we get ready to go.

THE LITTLE BOY TO THE LOCOMOTIVE

BIG iron horse with lifted head,
Panting beneath the station shed,
You are my dearest dream come true;—
I love my Dad; I worship you!

Your noble heart is filled with fire,
For all your toil, you never tire,
And though you're saddled-up in steel,
Somewhere, inside, I *know* you feel.

All night in dreams when you pass by,
You breathe out stars that fill the sky,
And now, when all my dreams are true,
I hardly dare come close to you.

THE LOCOMOTIVE TO THE LITTLE BOY

BOY, whose little, confiding hand
Your father holds, why do you stand
Staring in wonderment at me,—
Poor thing of iron that I be?

Your unsophisticated eyes
Are full of beautiful surprise;
And oh, how wonderful you are,
You little, golden morning-star!

Poor thing of iron that I be,
A mortal man imagined me;
But you—you drop of morning dew—
God and His heaven are globed in you.

TO THE ABSOLUTE

O WIND of death that blowest in the night,
That blowest, and art still;
O icy hand that comest with thy rite
Of cruel terror, just before the light,
The darkest hour of ill;
O breath of fate that whisperest away
The loves of years, the friendings of to-day,
Have ye not yet your fill?

So must it be forever, even so?—
The falling tide of change
Bears out to lost horizons all we know,
All we have loved and clung to, long ago,
Leaving us—something strange:
The dear, familiar lights die out at last;
The late, lost voices fading down the blast,—
They too, pass out of range.

O hidden life, O life, O unattained!
Not only in our dreams,
But given inwardly, and unexplained,
Through every word and memory ingrained,—
Deep as undrying streams:
Thou comest out of other realms than sight,

To the Absolute

There is naught earthly in the glamour light
Which on thy vesture gleams.

There is naught earthly, yet thou comest here
Askance, and half-astray;
As waysight lights, that suddenly draw near.
To railroad wanderers, blaze, and disappear,
So thou art torn away:
But ever, on the darkened window glass,
Our weary world goes with us, and alas!
Thou art a dream, always.

Thou art a dream, a somewhere out beyond
The sunset and the sea;
Thou art just failed of by the fingers fond
Of silver moons; thy magic shores respond
Only to melody;
Only to waves that fling their hearts to die
Far out where souls are sailors, and the sky
Is breaking over thee.

Thou art a dream, that moves not in the mind;
Thou art not thought, nor seen
With lidded eyes; thou feedest not the blind
Of mortal vision,—rapturous, undefined,
Eternally serene!
Thy beauty waits no faltering, feeble hand;
We part the petals, nor do understand
That thou should'st slip between.

To the Absolute

But sometimes, as on country roads we hear
 Wind-murmured wires hum;
Thy breath makes music to an awestruck ear,
Wild music of wild airs, of bliss and fear,
 And hearts to heaven come.
Thy whisper wakes what only slept before;
Our silent souls are silent now no more,
 We speak, who once were dumb.

But man is man, and may not lift too far
 His earthly, frail reply;
Man is but man; in pattern like a star,
His utmost efforts in this twilight are
 A fitful firefly;
He may not . . . ah!—to know, and yet to fail!
His hands may tremble to, not touch, the Grail
 That hovers from on high.

The whirlwind passes, lust and shame and sin,
 And anger passion-blind;
Remorse burns out, a flame, a deadly djinn;
And seven devils wait to welter in
 The smitten, tortured mind:
And after these, a voice exceeding small,
Lovelier than lutes, or waves, or waterfall
 Leaving green woods behind.

There comes a voice, but lingers not for long;
 A sighing in the trees,
 [97]

To the Absolute

It also passes, and the shadows throng
Once more; once more old fears grow strong,
 And ancient fantasies:
In doubt and darkness, baffled and misled,
We walk the world, and hear, far out ahead,
 The thunder of veiled seas.

DUE NORTH

ENOUGH: you have the dream, the flame;
Free it henceforth:
The South has given you a name;
Now for the North.

Unsheathe your ship from where she lies,
In narrow ease;
Fling out her sails to the tall skies,
Flout the sharp seas.

Beyond bleak headlands wistful burn
Warm lights of home;
In shutting darkness frays astern,
Far-spun, the foam.

Come wide sea-dawns, that empty are
Of wet sea sand;
Come eves, that lay beneath a star
No lull of land.

And whether on faint iris wings
Of fancy borne,
Or blown and breathed, the south wind brings
So much to mourn!

Due North

The deep wood-shadows, they that drew
 So softly near;
The violets all veined with blue,—
 Be strong, and steer!

There is a silence to be found,
 And rested in;
A stillness out of thought, where sound
 Can never win.

There is a peace, beyond the stir
 Of wind or wave;
A sleeping, where high stars confer
 Over the brave.

The south winds come, the south winds go,
 Caressing, dear;
Northward is silence, and white snow,—
 Be strong, and steer!

For in that silence, waiting, lies,
 Untroubled, true;
Oh, eager, clear—like love in eyes—
 The soul of you.

THE SAILOR WHO HAS SAILED

I HAVE dreamed the dream of the unknown sea,
And stood on the sightless shore;
I have looked in the eyes of reality,
And I am young no more.

There were old sea-kings that led me far
With songs of the ancient quest;
There were sails that followed the still north-star,
And helms that hung to the West:

There were speeches fair, and stories told,
And much that was promised me;
There were great sea-chests, and hidden gold;
“Sail out,”—they said,—“and see!”

I have sailed the reach of a trade-wind’s hand,
And left long wakes behind;
I have battled out from a lee-shore land,
And fought with a gale gone blind:

I have dallied in harbors, and moored at quays,
And jostled the world’s worst men;
I have followed the tide to the utmost seas,
And I am come back again.

The Sailor Who Has Sailed

There is treasure-trove in my hands, but gold
 I bring not back with me;
There are songs on deck and in the hold,
 But no wild minstrelsy.

I have dreamed the dream of the unknown sea;
 I have sailed from the sightless shore;
I have looked in the eyes of reality,
 And I am young—no more.

THE PRISON HOUSE

THIS house is winsome with perpetual glow
Of given hearts, each in another found,
And is forever humming with warm sound;—
The princely future feasting the long ago.

Rare friends there be, with beautiful straight eyes,
Comrades of fireside bloom and lifelong hail,
Matching at jests by rafter-light; the avail
Of hot-blood youth, mellowed and much more wise.

And many pleasant books therein there be,
Racy old apple-cheeks, time loved so much,
It ripened them; romances, plays, and such,
Spiced in the fumes of ancient history.

Life might be golden there—I do not say—
With love and friends, and books to browse among;
Many a toast and many a troth's unsung;
Chimney and logs suffice for many a day.

But there are rifts among the roof-trees, where
Planets hold high, and sometimes I have heard,
Far-off, the sudden outcry of a bird,
Answering a joy, heart-stopped, in open air.

The Prison House

Sidelong I've looked, and caught the unearthly stain
Of a great sunset, drifted on the glass,
And over me smelled flowers . . . Prisoner, alas!
Deep in my chair, I drudge at life again.

IN AN ANTHOLOGY

THIS is the world, and in these pages lie
Our little lives a-written long ago;
Here is the all that ever we shall know
Of life and hearts, of earth and sea and sky;
Here are sweet words for every passer-by,
Most precious words from lovers' lips that flow;
Sighs here, and pain, and wistful afterglow;
Even of wildflowers pressed before they die.

Most gentle reader, take, then, to thy fill,
From these faint bygone blossoms splendid toll;
Out of their sweetness living sweets distil,
And these high hearts—engrave them on thy soul!
Ah, give them resurrection, and they will
Bear up thy wings and lift thee to their goal

THE WASHINGTON STATUE IN WALL STREET

IMMORTAL more than bronze, in bronze he stands,
Through all our tumult unperturbed, sedate;
Coming, clear-eyed, out of the scorch of fate,
Rough reins and sword-hilts calloused in his hands.

How large he looms beyond this troubled hill!
How, lost in balancings of life and death,
He heeds the flutter of his country's breath,
And bids "I crave you, gentlemen, be still!"

This was the man who toiled through brutal seas
And broke the dreadful shadow of a throne;
Who supped with swords, and watched all night
alone,
Far off, in some great silence, on his knees.

FIFTY YEARS AFTER

1910

IT matters now no more whose eyes were best,—
Which saw at nearest hand the truest truth;
It matters, that both poured their clearest youth
And bravest treasure at the truth's behest.
Truth has her north and south, and each to each,
Being a whole, wide world apart, appears
Far gone in error, bigots with stuffed ears:
They fly to arms; and perish in the breach.
And yet . . . they died for truth . . . both sides
. . . we know.

Their blood still warms the interlying land;
In every breeze their haunting bugles blow,
And flitting shadow-shapes, like storm clouds meet
In forest glades; and where old bridges spanned
Deep streams, are heard, still, still, their tramping feet.

They leave us not, these dead, but gird us round,
Full panoplied, alert, on either hand;
Marching with her, the reunited land,—
Making her borders undisputed ground.
They leave us not, whose handing-on is ours,—
Unselfishness, and valor, and bright deeds!
By them we know 't is not in vain he bleeds
Whose country rears her children on such flowers.

ROUGH-HEW THEM HOW WE WILL

1913

FAR-FLYING warders turn and tell
Of thunders in the Dreadful Hills;
Pale prophets of destruction swell
Beneath our darkened window-sills:
Virtue is dead, they say, and song;
And civic pride is sore beset;
Riches are right, and honor, wrong;
The world remembers—to forget.

How are the walls of Babylon
Tumbled and moulderous and gray!—
And how her ruined Parthenon
The soul of Athens bears away!
Slow-moving as a mist of sleep,
The tides of destiny befall;
Sand cities reared heap on heap;—
The ocean overruns them all.

Yet are the pinnacles of gold
Beleagued by our heart's desire,
And still the hands of mortals hold
The anguish of immortal fire:

Rough-Hew Them How We Will

Death over death, the ramparts rise,
And life on life, the builders go;
The spirit in the coral dies,
The splendors of the coral grow.

What patient orbits lived and burned,
Of ages ere we came to birth?
What spent eternities returned?—
What æons of a single earth?
Deep from the dust of ancient kings
Break forth their battlefields again;
The saga of the deathless rings
From twice two thousand years of men.

THESE UNITED STATES

Feb. 7, 1917

(To Alan Seeger)

I

NEW, for the most part; very, very new.
Flimsy houses, mostly turned askew;
Streets that straggle, where, not long ago,
Timber stood, then cows grazed, now papers blow.
Much too busy to be tidy, bent
On being bigger—one big circus tent.
Somewhat slangy; not devoid of cheek;
Loving noise, and loving best to speak.
Swayed by headlines; governed by a shout;—
Nine days of wonder, then a new one's out.
Bashful in nothing; reverent in few;
New, for the most part; very, very new.
But—beneath the newness, in behind
All the brag and splurge and jest, we find
This: Old memories of homespun days,
Candle-lit; of quiet, sabbath ways
Won from wildernesses, fervent prayer
Given in peril's proof; young feet worn bare,

These United States

Hands tough-trained, and level-looking eyes
Keen on gunsights, calm as evening skies;
Memories of battle, richly drowned
In warm life-blood, heroes-wrapped-around,—
Deep, too deep for tears, not spoken of
Save by that great love which answers love;
Memories of old songs, carried far
Over wide prairies, past peaks that are
Torches to the sunrise, past the spires,
Star-outlined, of trees; by rain-ringed fires
Gleaned, and sung again on wind-bleached foam
With brave ships for China, praising home,
Proudly, to strange skies; most sweet, most fair
Songs, the old, old same songs, everywhere.
Memories and going deeper—dreams.
Dreams brought over seas, the first faint gleams;
Cherished, through storm cherished; dim and pale
But not dying dreams; still held, still hale,
Still with haughty stars defended, still,
Aloof, like eagles, brooding their bright will.

II

New, for the most part; very, very new.
Anglo-Saxon, German, Celt and Jew,
Latin, Armenian, Negro, Slav, Chinese,
Scandinavian, Hindoo, Dutch—all these.
Foreign tongues, not light to extirpate;
Feuds, hard-dying, Old-World, out of date.
Huddled herds in cities; labor, lined,

These United States

Often, with backward looks; love, left behind
Seed wild-sown the wind has foisted far;
Rude wave-welter of all creeds that are.
Gallant the ship; a motley crowd the crew;—
New for the most part, very, very new.
But—beneath the newness, in behind
All the warp and tug and strain, we find
This: Old hungerings of long-dead days
Spirit-bowed; of cruel, down-trod ways
Sore with subjugation; backs that meant
Overseers' whip-lashes, the bent,
Yoked abasement of once noble wills
Lunging at thongs between their masters' thills,—
Beasts of burden being; hungerings
Germinate in darkness, gouged by kings,
Bruised by heels of armies, overborne,
Time on time, by conquest, despot-torn;
Living, yet, miraculous alive;
Daunted not, continuing to thrive
Towards the sunlight; hungerings to be
Shackles through, and sea-glad, and got free;—
Hungerings for open spaces, wide
Of horizon, reaching out; to stride
Fields not fenced a summer's day, and be
Happy at moonrise; to get free . . . free.
Hungerings, and going deeper—fires.
Fires brought over seas, immense desires,
Smouldering, subterranean; smothered, dim
But not dying fires; still lodged, still grim,

Still with stubborn griefs defended, still
Anchored like iron rock-deep in proud will.

III

Dreams. Fires. Fraught clouds from Europe blow,
Whose rampired walls full sulphurously glow
With battleflare at sunrise; overseas
Breaks the beached foam of wasting panoplies,
And faintly, as in sea-shells, far away,
The cannon thunder whispers night and day.
Fires. Dreams. In factory belch fuliginous,
In caisson gloom and skyey balanced truss;
By cobweb rails to fabled Ophirs spun;
On lapping tides; down darkened streets, is done—
Gestation of a giant doomed to birth—
The forging of a new and mightier earth.
A mightier. And a better? Not by ease—
By shoulder shrugs and oiled immunities.
Not by midnight riot. Once again.
They shall inherit most who most live plain.
Ay, fear it not, the little breed that knows
Nothing but wantonness, it goes—it goes.
A bolder blood shall stride into the part;
Shall take the stage; shall wield a manlier art,
And put a shame on mimic. Even now
Is troubled in his sleep the Sleeper's brow.
Unrest, like mist, grows ghostlier. It seems
The Thinker questions. . . . Travail.
Fire and dreams.

These United States

Dark overhead the clouds of Europe blow,
Heat-lightning-lit, dull, ominous and low.
Not yet, not yet the hour, but, tryst to keep,
A spirit moves abroad upon the deep,
And will be stirring soon. And will be sung,
Soon, to a clarion of nobler tongue
Than inks on ticker-tapes or glibly reads
From pompous records of parochial greeds
Promulgate for the People. . . . Midnight blue.
Stars of these States a-shining through,
The dawn awaited. Dreaming, peaks and spires;—
The house still locked and dreaming.
 Dreams—and fires.

IV

Thou whose full time both buds and stars await;—
On the curved cup of destiny whose hold
Permits no bubble world its concave gold
Too buoyant to relinquish; at whose gate
Love takes her lantern and goes out to Hate,
Bending above the battle's bleeding mould;
Our country thou in fire and dreams enfold—
In forest freshness, her, thy consecrate.
There must be some strange beauty hid in her,
With withes uncut by sharp awakening sword;
Some precious gift not veined, some truth of power
Thou art maturing, great artificer.
Fools we, and blind; impatient of an hour;
But make her worthy, for we love her, Lord!

A PINE BOX—AND THE FLAG

THAT tree once touched the stars. The flame
Went down it of the dawn;
Brave, whistling airs awoke it. Came
Death to the heart of it, straight-aim . . .
The steel could be withdrawn.

That way is best: the naked thing
In its own dignity.
Sweet wood, to which wood odors cling
Still, and what a proud covering
For fallen man and tree.

Proud flag!—how meekly it is prone
On that residual breast!
Asks not his name—nor was he known
Widely—just loves him; that alone,
Putting aside the rest.

New wishes in those stars; new prayers
Said in those precious veins:
New trees, new dawns, new boisterous airs;
But no new flag!—'tis theirs, 'tis theirs!—
Their blood in it remains.

THE HOUSING OF THE BANNERS

(To Joyce Kilmer)

I HAD a vision: Near an open sky,
In aisles of trees,
With windy songs and rustling tread, went by
Dark panoplies.
They might have been the music of night air,
Or shadows of the stars; no bugle blare,
No shattering shot; I looked—and they were there,
Cadenced like seas.

They moved one way, as clouds move when the moon
Is being drowned;
They drew along a singing, but the tune
Was less than sound:
And every marcher came as he was gone,
So like, so many did I look upon;
The wood was full of faces, pale and wan.
None turned around.

Dry leaves and I went with them, drifting slow
As might a sleep
That followed, waking, dreams it fain would know
And could not keep;

The Housing of the Banners

Till leagues were lost: then rugged ground ahead,
And stars, and then a silence, far outspread. . . .
So on a hillside wildflower stalks are shed
 When reapers reap.

I saw them lie, down through the stubble grass,
 And ruined shade;
Not all were whole, not all full-limbed, alas,
 But, sad betrayed
By ebbing starlight, up that hill lay all,
And down that hill and far beyond recall,
Tumbled in windrows widening; whose fall
 Was unafraid.

Whose fingers reached toward daylight.
 Came the stir
 Of one small breeze,
As might a smile be, pitiful, from her
 Whose child would please
With songs for sorrow; then, it seemed, a sigh
That candle flames might steady through went by,
And brought a shudder underneath that sky,
 Of sore unease.

A miracle!—like hairs upon my head,
 In cold accord
They stood; those multitudes of stretched-out dead,
 Straight and restored.
And now were ranks, and now were flags unfurled,

The Housing of the Banners

And now went out a music on the world,
Wherefrom broke words, like bubbles, darkly
 swirled,—
 Pricked with a sword.

“O warm earth air, to feel the dawn again
 Down hillsides go;
To hear flocked cattle wake, and the refrain
 Of far cocks blow!
What gifts we gave who stripped us of these things:
No more, ah, never, steeped in blossomy springs,
Shall life brim over us in opening rings,
 Or pale cheeks glow?

“Shall love be never rosied for our sakes,
 More, as of old?
Nor sunlight fall through apple-boughs, in flakes
 Of fluttering gold?
Where shall we learn the like of sudden feet
Coming down garden walks, beat to heart's beat?
O precious life!—O passionate and sweet
 Tales to be told!

“A murmur in the hills; a waft away
 To beckoning deeds;
So—it were best to longer not a day:
 Who hears it, heeds.
Spirits are dipped in starlight long before
They drink the sun, and starlight sways them more.

The Housing of the Banners

Dreams;—or remembrance? Youth runs bright on
war,
And bleeds—and bleeds.

“There is a troth beyond the leap of eyes;
A pledge too far
For traveling light to flicker across skies
From star to star:
O warm earth air, no more, no more for you
These banners, with their good brave scars. They too
Are Truth’s: you shall not stir them. O be true.
Earth, as they are!

“And in the deep years be in mind of them,
When shadows go
Through forests, or touch hilltops, or a stem
Lifts heart aglow
From treacherous glooms. Remember us, awhile,
With gifts of open doorways, and a smile
Or two, when a bird sings in some sweet aisle
We used to know.”

I heard no more, for came a great fanfare
Of golden sound;
Awakening trumpets, mounting, stair by stair,
In spiral round:
And lo, a cloudy roof and window stain
On ancient columns lifting their clear grain
Through such a calm as never breathes again,—
So deep its swound.

The Housing of the Banners

On either side of that long nave there hung
 Trophies most dear,
And all high deeds were there that song has sung,—
 Godlike to hear;
Only a little, yet—so far, so high—
Those walls were theirs the world will not let die;
The cross upon the altar was like sky
 A lake draws near.

The trumpets touched pride's pinnacle, and broke,
 In spray outspread;
A cloud of banners filled the air like smoke,
 And all those dead
Shook earth as might embattled seraphim,
With one great shout. The silence seemed to swim
With heavenly color, as that youth's o'er-brim
 Was harvested.

I was alone, to drink the drowsy air
 Of languid day;
The dawn remembered banners; stair by stair
 The birds climbed. They
Upon the hillside . . . they were poppies, blown
With sleep. It is not grief's high part to own
Tears. Rather, smiles! I plucked me, all alone,
 A red bouquet.

REQUIESCAT

(April 23rd, 1916)

THAT marble bust marks Shakespeare's bones;
A perfect likeness"—Cook's guide drones.
"He wrote those words: they're poetry.
That's all. There's nothing else to see."
Twittering birds in the trees outside;
Peace in the church: gone crowd and guide:
Peace in the church: the afternoon
Wanes long; the creaking verger soon
Comes with his keys. One night the more
Will close above this chancel floor,
And largest chink let in no gleams.
What meant he by his Hamlet's "dreams"?—
His Lear and old man's madness? Came
Horror, at last, to tinge the flame
Prometheus plucked from heaven; and he?—
Looked he too deep? Such things can be.
Our gain is purchased so. 'Twere best,
Just as he asked, to let him rest.
Centuries under, ceiled with stones,—
That marble bust marks Shakespeare's bones?
The very mention, lark-like, goes
Sky-clambering in clearest rose,

Requiescat

And thicket copses, one by one,
Wake, answering, and bugles run
From green, enchanted glade to glade;
Courtiers, huntsmen cavalcade;
Battles are brewed; braves loves beat high;
Adventure quickens, hounds give cry;—
Youth, youth is up; the world is young,
And life, rich life, is still unsung.
Shakespeare!—warm sunlight breaks in twain
Death; and the violets bloom again.

GRACE COURT, BROOKLYN HEIGHTS

TURNED eight o'clock; the street lights thro
Exactly as in long ago,
Deep garden glooms, and traceries
From out of overhanging trees.
Two stars—the Twins—against a sky
Of April violets, fading, lie
Just as they used to do; the bay
Utters old voices, far away,
And in the church across the stones
An organ grumbles undertones
To little piping trebles, where
A choir recites for Sunday prayer.
The play, the scene are both the same;
The plot—too far advanced—I blame
For something sad in all around,
Deeper than outward change would sound.

The brook of boyhood runs away,
An eager freshet, in a day.
Oh, spring and night!—to feel again
That after-supper high disdain;—
That rush of wings, while daylight dies,
For one more romp; that paradise
Of being hatless, bouncing ball,
With sweet spring twilight over all,

Grace Court, Brooklyn Heights

And one late hurdy-gurdy, bent
On bubbling out its merriment.
Oh, bliss!—to have once more at hand
A predatory German band,
With bleating bass and martial blare,
And no horizon anywhere
But happiness of little boys
Imbibing deep of big brass noise.
A few days older, not much more,
And proud romance is at the door,
With flying hair, and floating laughter
For home-from-school to follow after.

How prone fond memory is to praise
That happiest of holidays,
When boys and girls would blithe embark,
On bicycles, for Prospect Park!
How fresh returns that early green
Of shaven lawns; that feathered sheen
Of shrubs and shoots; how good the sun,
And youth, how lightly worn—and won!
I never hear the slimmest rhymes
That marched to music in those times,
Without a stab of sudden pain,
To shut my eyes and be again,
Almost, and yet just not be, young
As when those songs were being sung.
I never hear *The Geisha* played,
Or *Sousa* or *The Serenade*,

Grace Court, Brooklyn Heights

But, radiant, out of memory burst
The joyful times I heard them first.
What heart-beats in those airs remain;—
Absurd old measures tripped in twain!
How golden, in the vagrant West,
Like billowing clouds, those first and best
And sweetest dances gleam and glow
Above the hills of long ago!
How bright with sails, their sea all smiles,
They voyage for the happy isles!
Those times!—when each ingredient soul
Was stirred, as in a spirituous bowl,
Into one glorious flame, that ended
Only because the sun ascended;
And long, long after, blessed, like prayer,
The bloom of hearts upbreathing there.
Those times!—who once did dance them through
Will not forget. (Will you? Will you?)

To-night the lilac bushes are
An incense to the evening star;
And little wafts of fragrance rise
To where the tree-tops brush the skies.
A soft wind down the twilight stair
Tip-toes, and stirs the willow's hair:
The poplar leaves, like ghosts in grey,
Flutter frail things no tongue could say;
And over all the gardens gleams
The pallor of departed dreams.

STUDIES

I

APRIL IN THE CITY

SOMEONE has brought arbutus for my table,
Wood-wild arbutus, with pink, imprinted petals.
I lifted the brown stems, and while they dripped out
water,
Cut the white thread that wound them too together.
Now they reward me with deep sighs of fragrance,
Breathing to shut lids lost Aprils, and the groping
Through leaves and wet roots, happily to pluck them.
Someone strikes chords now, grave, at the piano:
They seek with probing fingers petals among heart-
strings.

II

POUGHKEEPSIE BRIDGE

Dainty, of thin steel, arched above faint water,
One right line the bridge cuts black against the sunset;
Under it are shadows blown, where windy-dark the
river
Wrinkles like gargoyles; on it a long freight train
Stands, as a steed stands waiting a far errand.

Whence does its dream come; out of what horizons?
Star of headlight, and tall breath; gold to green of
gloaming:

On the hills a planet. Pilgrimage, or passing?

Somewhere in remembrance such a search went forward.

III

EAST RIVER

Stale of tides the harbor is, underneath the hawsers;
Idle glut of flotsam, empty crates and fruit rinds:

Noon, and not a ripple stirs the stagnant water.

Yet the sea is felt there, somehow, for the counter,
Shining black—a proud hull—serpentine reflections,
Ribbon furls and knots of light, splinter-points and
sunbursts.

Can it be a ship sleeps, wrapping dreams around her,
Keeping her, remotely, from all taint of evil?

Ah, the open ocean, beautiful, unsullied!

IV

APPLE BOUGH

Petals are ephemeral; soon to be forgotten;

Blown like kisses of a dream over pale horizons.

Leaned above the pasture bars, that bough of apple
blossom

Takes the sunset northward; cranes the hillside
grasses;
Stoops the caravan of stars low on wistful twilights;
Yet upon a rift of sky lattices departure,
Wears on ripeness, with sharp joy cleaves too close
to beauty.
Spring is at moment now; touched to point of rap-
ture:
Life is to drink. The quaffing makes thirst live for-
ever.

V

CRAIGIE HOUSE

How shall the stars' pale fingers on that sundial
Rewrite remembrance? How dream dreams, enclois-
tered
Deep in that old shadow-drift, up and down that
garden?
Life here was opened once, a yellow rose, and ro-
mance
Paced its reluctance home, with pauses into by-paths.
Music may be waked again, petal songs set stirring,
But here no more the spring lights wings of flame
on shoulders.
That dim house, Colonial, sweet with first America,
Let it be. The sharp moon scimiters the poplars.

VI

THE SWING

Is there else could touch so perfectly, together,
Youth and full May? Smiles were asleep without
her.

When she ran down that hillside, it was laughter
Running upon the stage: plot and players brightened.
Now in that swing—not knowing from a hilltop
Gallery gods throw kisses through the leaves before
her—

She is her childhood, indecorous as blossoms;
Nodding to clouds, the Mischief, then, maidenlike,
retreating.

What is youth? That bird knows. He'll make odes
about her.

VII

BREAKNECK POND

Why not here? The place gives dreams and gauzy
dragon-flies.

Barefoot must the search be after purple orchids:
Over ooze and sedge grass, treading up the bubbles
Hotly from the bottom mud, to the verge of water-
lilies

Ventured within reach of by dint of tangled tussocks.

Boldly seized, the hollow stems, dripping sultry
water,
Yield; but ah, the petals, closed in charmed siesta,
Sleep, like children hurried on a journey.
All the water-rings make land. Theft so soon forgotten?

VIII

WISHING TREE

Bark, be-wrinkled, like a face, a hag's brown parchment;
Leaves, a-rattle, dry as bones swinging at the cross-roads;
Gnarled boughs wide, a tree stands, conjuring the sunset:
Old Meg Merrilies at work; all the sky, before her,
One red smoke; all the land, dumbly bending lower.
Clip her waist, before she turns! Fondly, at your peril!
Wish, man; wish! The moment hovers. Breathe it out beside her!
(Be it slyly done, it falls in her incantations.)
Whist!—'tis well: the dead, blanched moon rises over shoulder.

JACK O' DREAMS

(To Alfred Noyes)

ON Brooklyn Bridge, at evening, coming home
against the moon,

From the city, where the toilers ebb and flow;

In shadow that a tower cast,—

As light as though a flower passed,

I met him, but I knew him not, I knew him not—so
soon.

(I was from the city, then, and couldn't know.)

Oh, nothing but a poor old man from sunny Italy,—

From the land where the purple grapevines grow;

A bundle on his back he bore,

And bent as though his pack he wore

From childhood; but I knew him not, and passed him
carelessly.

(There was hurry in my eyes; I couldn't know.)

But out beneath the moon once more was nothing
just the same,

There was witchcraft in the spillings of that moon;

No longer, now, half dead with care,

I walked the clouds with head in air

Jack O' Dreams

And feet that went, unwittingly, from tip to tip of
flame.

(There was witchcraft, and it caught me very
soon.)

The cables of the Bridge were strings, upon a violin—

There were four of them and every one in tune;

A wind that drew a cloud along

Made music that was loud and strong;

It only needed dancers for the revels to begin.

(There was music—oh, such music!—and a moon.)

Then—down the walk and up the walk and winding
out and in,

On a tarantelle and carmagnole they came;

With skip and leap and laugh and shout,

A giddy, dizzy raff and rout,

They rode upon the heart-beats of that roaring violin.

(There was thunder in the heart of it—and flame.)

Grave citizens, immaculate, and toughs from out of
town,

And a dozen different specimens of girl;—

Gay débutantes went hand in hand

With factory girls from candy land,

And subway guards cut capers round a Wall Street
magnate's frown.

(There were mighty strange companions in that
whirl.)

Jack O' Dreams

And, oh, the shine of happiness that lit them as they
danced!

It was more than moonlight over them—that shine;
They gave it broadcast, each and all,
From one small newsboy's screech and call:
“Hey, mister!”—to a traffic-squad-policeman's horse,
that pranced.

(There was every sort of culture in that line.)

To left, to right—they circled me, like Neptune's
Nereid,

In a chain without a single broken link;
And all the lights around the rim
Began to dip and bound and swim,—
The Woolworth Tower winked at me, upon my soul,
it did!

(There was very solemn laughter in that wink.)

Then, all at once, the moon was quenched in flying,
frosty cloud,—

Just a moment, but it snapped the dizzy spell;
The music changed to creaking heels,
To tugboat toots, to shrieking wheels,
And died beneath a trolley car that hauled a huddled
crowd.

(There was slaughter in the beating of that bell.)

The dancers vanished, utterly, like witch-flame in a
mire,

Jack O' Dreams

Leaving weary, white-faced toilers in their stead.
Once more the city flowed away
Adown a cobbled road of grey,
Its workshop lights behind it like a palisade of fire.
(There was home, a spark of happiness ahead.)

Oh, nothing but a poor old man from sunny Italy,—
From the land where the purple grape-vines
grow. . . .
It may be—but his pack, it seems,
Held somewhat more, and Jack o' Dreams
Is what I call him. Were they dreams, or were they
prophecy?
(There were strange things in that pack, is all
I know.)

UNDERGROUND

LIFE prods us here so fast, so herded we,
Men become moles and travel underground.
It isn't pleasant: not just gay and free,
But now and then, for all its obloquy,
Sight comes to deeper depths down there, I've found.

Take this, for instance; not so long ago:
A little after flood, the tide still ran
Full current of that human undertow,
I wedged in with the rest, and to and fro,
Took turns in breathing from a painted fan.

Scant room enough—a picture-puzzle space
I fitted in precisely; on one side
A sulky Falstaff, grunting his disgrace,
On the other, a shopgirl with hat-hidden face,
Reading a paper opened very wide.

Her hand, stretched out across my downward gaze,
Unconsciously, to read, was mine for clue
Of all her cloudy years and priceless days.
She read the paper, I, the hidden ways
Of nature, groping, blindly, to come through.

Underground

A not too comely hand, red, rough and soiled;
Nails not just clean, nor shapely; knuckles those
Of one who takes hard knocks; a hand that toiled
From childhood, and was wept on—not a spoiled;
White heroine of leisure; not a rose.

But kept its holiness through all, that told,
Somehow, of what a woman's heart, deep down
Makes mention of, in maiden wisdom stoled;—
Of mother-hunger reaching out to hold
A little child, for love to own, and crown.

Was it the roundness, wedding thumb and wrist;
The plump, full curve, completing the whole hand?
Partly, I think, and something more, I missed—
Too subtle to be gleaned—some moonlight-kissed,
Faint, guarded goodness out of fairyland.

Some dignity appealing for desire,
Too rare for fleshly heart to write upon;
Some star-tipped, icy pinnacle of fire,
The sunrise points, and mariners admire,—
Some nook of heaven no sooner seen than gone.

A woman's weakness in that hand combined
With what the world were lost for wanting of:
Youth hardly yielded it for years to find.
Down in those depths lay dreaming, half divined,
That glory to light seas—a woman's love.

And all this while, I have remembered her,
And wondered . . . by her cog-wheel world caught
in,

Poor and unmarried, would ripe nature stir,
Or being balked, succumb to character
And wreak slow vengeance where it could not win.

A riddle, this, I have no thought to read,
Only to bring to light; just to propound
Once, and leave off: there may be who will heed.
This much I take for truth, not faith or creed,—
Goodness is better down there—underground.

A YOUNG GIRL SINGS

WEAKNESS, perhaps. The anæsthetic fumes
Die hard; and nausea dilutes courage more,
Even, than pain—the little creeping pain
That flickers here and there like northern lights
Haunting pale polar stars. (Each new nerve cries.)
It was, most likely, weakness.

First there came
Misgivings, ugly ones, the kind that blow
A cold sea-fog on confidence; then fears,
As when an army wavers; then, slow wings
Dark-clustering on trees; the carcass—doubt.
Memory disgorged, but, dog-like, took again
The pallet-bed on wheels; the staff in white;
The rubber cap to draw from; last, the fumes.
Always, for sequel, furious revolt,
That consciousness, the gallant blaze of things,
The lighted loveliness containing all,—
History, beauty, childhood, love of friends,
The war in Europe, home, the noisy street,—
Should dwindle, and they with it, all the world,
For one thumb-pinch of vapor, to a spark
Etching an aimless pattern on blank walls;—
Spent fire in chimney-soot. Was life so small?

A Young Girl Sings

Was death? . . . This argued it. (So gangrened doubt.)

Came then an evening, full of sunset sky,
That burned the brownstone cornices to gold,
And tugged the sick-room curtains like a sail;
Till life just breathed again. But listlessly,
And leaden. Doubt still sank it. Then—oh, then—
A voice, through open windows; a young girl's,
High singing. Very soft, at first, and sweet,—
Cool rill-notes before dawn and after rain,—
But brimming, soon, and flooding fuller, soon,
And breaking banks and overflowing, till
It seemed, the room, the street, the city, aye,
The very sunset, were caught up in song
And thrilled it through and through like one great
chord
Triumphing.

So a wave, up-wandering
From drifted slopes beyond the ocean's rim,
Filling its lap with stars, might heave the dawn,
At last, with happy shoulders, on the land.
And so might rumor come, of battle turn,
At dusty noon adown a village street
Deserted, dreading news: now pieced-out words,
Incredible, through chinks in blinds, and now
A populace at doorways, looking out,
With tears and laughter for their dear land saved,
On tattered flags, and cannon choked with grime,

A Young Girl Sings

And faces—friendly faces!—bringing home
Victory.

Strange that God should come back so,
And youth, and hope, and clinging happiness;—
Just for a voice, a girl's voice. But, you see,
It wasn't just a voice. Birds sing, and souls. . . .
Life isn't small. And death? There is no death.

SONNETS FROM THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

I

THERE is a beauty, after all is said,
Unreached forever. Not when music dies,
And earth dissolves in rapture of deep sighs;
Not by the dance, down glades of moonlight fled;
Nor poetry, echoing death-chants to the dead,
Is it unveiled: and yet, so near it lies,
The lonely wanderer feels its faunlike eyes,
And almost has it—by a turn of head.
A rainbow spirit, tokened with unrest,
It brushes wings, indues its deity,
For half a glimpsing-time; and then—is flown,
A vanishing of rose leaves through the West,
A shining prevalence wasting on a blown,
Blue distance of pale, impermanent sea.

III

Like the soft changes in a woman's eyes
Beside the fire, who, dreamingly withdrawn
Down distant by-ways where her youth has gone,
Now, chin in hand, makes happy enterprise
Of memory; or like first spring that hies,

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

With shadows of sweet April, up the lawn;
So is the sea, immediate with dawn,—
With one plumed planet scanning the proud skies.
Into the deep subsides the living dark,
And over it, just breathing, breaks the rose;
Then a white wave-top, washing the far rim,
Wakes, and the sea is lonely for one bark;—
Lonely as beauty, lonely as love to him
Who, fain to follow, knows not where it goes.

V

When the blue sea is bitten with sharp wind,
And gathers panic even as it goes,
Right to the southward, bellowing its woes
To the bare sky, I wonder if some mind
There be not, far to land but intertwined
With it, that crying, southward also flows,
And in the swaying of a garden rose
Leans beyond years to a lost love behind.
And when the sea-light gradually dies
From wave to wave, a grieving wanderer,
It is, then, unto me, as if there came
The quiet aching in a young lad's eyes—
Expectant eyes, all glowing with young flame—
Who sees his first love fade, and does not stir.

VI

A blink of sunlight on the cabin floor;
A scouring-out of port-holes with wet sea;

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

Laughter on deck; a song along the lee;—
The ships, the old, old ships, are young once more:
Younger than Nineveh, younger than the shore
Of blue-beguiled Iberia, or free,
Imperial Knossos, skilled in victory;—
Younger than these, yet olden long before.
Butting the head-seas, joyous, once again,
They clew close down and let their scuppers run
With gusty music-chucklings, and bright foam.
After them!—follow them!—galleon fleets of Spain,
Beaks from the North, and triremes of great Rome!—
Reached not the Happy Islands?—none? Not one.

VII

Like music stilled, that very far away,
Goes treading, in the foot-prints of a tune;
Or like pale twilight, sad for afternoon
Lost, it was comrades with but could not stay;
There is a singing waked, a gleam of day
Divine and dying, when the romantic moon
Walks with the lonely sea; a radiance strewn
Of some great passing, none can mourn as they.
Love is remembrance, an aroma rare
Of some dear, doorway guest, who, hardly known,
Smiled, and went on (we will not say, who died);
Leaving her semblance on a turning stair,
Forever after, tender—amid stone.
Sea; moon; a third? Nay!—there is none beside.

XII

Like as an arrow, loosed against the night,
Impales Capella of the Charioteer,
Or lunges into Perseus like a spear,
Proud and predominant in upward flight,
Then, ere a single star has bloomed more bright,
Feels courage dwindle, die, and disappear;
So love leaps up, and so, in heaven's tier,
Tainted with earth, slips backward from delight.
There is a waywardness belying bliss,
A warp against the current of all joy;
A knock, inimical, upon the door,
Forbidding rapture; a dark precipice
That, cross who may, will not let laughter o'er;—
A canker seeking rose-buds to destroy.

XIII

Spirits there are, intuitively great,
Who will not own the serfdom of desire,
But when the cinders of their first-blown fire
Cease to be stars, and rain down desolate,
Rise up, go forth, and eye to eye with fate,
Of common, coarse-cut stone and tight-strung wire
Make statues that are god-heads, and a lyre
Whose lifted song long years reverberate.
They hate the little limits that hedge in
Joy, and the narrowness of each new day;

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

Despise old gifts, and out of raw defeat
Rear their own heaven's roof for dreams to win;
Making obeisance at a Mercy Seat
Never more earth's. Then they too pass away.

XIV

As on cold window-glaze the sunset burns,
Beyond a strait where grey-plumed seabirds cry,
So, in carved sepulchres, the great dead lie
Illuminate, long after funeral urns
Have spilled their dust on centuries; returns
Forever, so, a glory down the sky,—
A lyric gladness each brave soul spread high,
One stave above the stature thought discerns.
Almost it is as if another air
Were round these relics, full of cloudy gold
And twilight tints, a different place and time,—
Sequestered, like a quiet sea-cove, where
Waves become dreams, and booming rocks, the chime
Of distant church-bells indolently tolled.

XIX

When Da Vinci painted his Gioconda, so,
He verged by stealth on Beauty's holiness,
And would have had her naked truth, unless,
Just as he came she had not chanced to go;
Leaving him staggered, all his heart aglow
With one, arch, backward look, one veiled caress,

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

And one pale instant of the prophetess,—
Blended and blinded in one smiling No.
He wrote that smile along his lady's lips,
Indelible, unfading;—flowerlike, rare
And momentary mouth! Winds have gone by,
Bearing baled merchandise on old-world ships
Into a listening, luminous, lost sky.
Lady, dead lady, art thou also there?

XXIII

Words are to dreams a wired and golden cage
Wherein, made captive, some enchanting bird
Is listened to for music that is heard
In wooded freedom only; or a page
Of butterflies, wing-spread for pilgrimage,
But never, never flying, nor bestirred
By happy preference: each printed word
A theft from youth, all overgrown with age.
Remembrance of a momentary bliss,
The flash of wings when Beauty crossed the blue;—
To speak—can arms encircle empty air
And so enact the quiver of a kiss?
Always that pain and always that despair:
Yet there are hearts with singing all shot through.

XXV

A summer beach, warm drowsing; clean, wet sand
With filling footprints; boys and girls and sea.

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

Here, hose and shoon discarded, rapturedly
They run the gauntlet; here, linked hand in hand,
Adventure off their native bridge of land—
Foam-deep to instep, ankle and then knee—
To scurry home again in panic glee,
With clothes caught high, and limbs all shining
tanned.

Beauty wafts inland, Love to seaward blows,
And meeting, part, and parting, meet no more.
One golden moment blended, they are still;
In children, in the bud-break of a rose.
The petals bloom, the childish zest burns chill:
The wind is desolate upon the shore.

XXVII

Museum maunderings! A shelf of bones;—
Old yellow skulls with matted hair and stain
Of time's erosion; death's-heads with migraine,
Set out to cool, so many fresh-cooked scones
What of them? Measurements; cephalic zones;
The long and short of them? Nay!—but again
To kindle here a burning human brain,—
A flickering spirit—on these altar stones.
Somewhat was here, snuffed out; some smouldering
fire;

Some incense not just earthly, so it seems.
No mollusc this, a flaccid fill of shell,—
But crowded to its roof-trees with desire. . . .

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

Once through these windy corridors there fell
The backward laughter of departing dreams.

XXXII

It may be Beauty walks in widening rings
Forever, Love's first colloquy the stone;
Truth is, perchance, the ebb-tide of the unknown,
Laying old beaches bare of long-dead things;
But life roots deep, and twenty thousand springs
Suffice not for one garden fully grown:
Dry drift of leaves; the birds' oak overthrown;—
Next year the warbler in a new tree sings.
Earth holds to life, impenitent of time
Admitted—she a child then—once for all;
Dreaming past failure, up the precipice
Where, niche by niche, her seedlings lodge and climb;
Her splendid strivings strewing the abyss,
Exultant in the few that did not fall.

XXXV

Like singing in the sea-light, off the wane
Of afternoon (when, weathered mainsails wide,
The fishing fleet heads home, and overside
Are chanties of the wet, entangled seine
And shining catch in scuppers) is the pain
Of Beauty's passage, wistfully descried;—
The music of a dream-entinctured tide
On shadowy ships, and a far-held refrain.
Remembrance if there be of Beauty's face,—

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

A groping-back for blind, lost lineaments
The heart aches over, half regathering,
It trembles from no earthly hiding-place;
Some deep oblivion yields it, ring on ring,
Haunting horizons. . . . Whence? I know not
whence.

XXXVI

Love keeps the day—broken to stars—all night.
There is such patience in it as prevails
Beyond cool hours of sleep and sable sails
To brimming basins of fresh morning light,
And wearies-out the trip of death's despite
Down world-old eaves. Love leans the scales
That little from the level which yet quails
The brow of Fate, the bronze and malachite.
Love waits, great dreamer, and with face in hands
Hears the faint moan of winds āround the world,
The lap of waves, the pebbles brooks wash bare,
Heedful how slowly loose the swaddling bands
From that hid future hovering in air;—
Lily and leaf in one brown earth-bulb furled.

XLII

If it be true that flowers are very fair
For sweet allure and tintured marriage fee
Of moon-white moth or brown, benignant bee
With pollen on his back, and have no care—
Despite a fragrance filling all the air—

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

For such vain shapes of shadowland as we,
Then in themselves they outreach artistry,
And loved by one, are lovely everywhere.
And we, warm human hearts, it may be, grow
Beyond a beauty visiting on eyes
For some desired endearing, to a power
A thought more perfect than our pulses know:
It may be in some slowly-opened hour,
Bleeding at heart, we perfume Paradise.

XLIII

Music there is, deeper than melody
Of meadow brooks or dust-blown serenade
A creaking wagon comes on at up-grade
Against the sunset, from shy woods won free
By hidden hermit-thrushes; songs there be
Whose based accompaniment no strings have played,
Whose compass balks the seamost barricade,
Where all the land is sung by all the sea:
Beauty there is, beyond the glamorous foam
Of apple-buds new breaking, or the stir
A sudden star brings, rifting after rain,
All ringed with drops from leaves, the quiet home
Of water-lilies (Far it is and fain,
And sad for beauty's sake), called Character.

XLVII

I know not if a better bloom there be
Than this rough earth gives, being trodden down

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

By wager of young feet in death's renown,
On shining fields of breathless bravery:
Unless it were some tight-lipped loyalty
Drudging its days out in a home-spun gown;
Tasting each drop of life's most bitter brown,
And humming all the while, heart-breakingly.
There is an answer, sworn to with the eyes,
For every hint of Beauty's querying.
Required, young loss?—a life is flung away;
Sorrow?—a heart is forfeit and hope dies
By inches; faith?—how beautiful are they
That round a wounded cause come rallying!

I.

Not in the pith and marrow of men's bones;
Not in the blood, nor penciled on the brain;
A voice, yet not well heard; a dream, not plain;
A music, intermingled with deaf tones;—
There is an urge that enters in and owns
Beyond the power of putting off again.
A calling in the night, a stir of pain,
Unrest and exile up wild mountain lones:
There is a fealty affirmed so far,
The adverse cunnings of a wintry sky
Adread it not; it is too stout for fate,
And is undaunted of men's eyes. They are
Brief, life; frail, flesh; not good are we, nor great;—
Show us where Beauty went, for she passed by!

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

LIII

Great winds are out: havoc is in the trees.
So be it. Snuff the stars; unslip the rain;
Let ruin run like blood. In vain, in vain!
Comes courage in its cockle-boat, and keys
Its pigmy voice above catastrophes,—
Singing immortally its old disdain
Of sudden death, enrapturing again
Doom's ramparts with a choir of Victories.
How beautiful that music is! How warm
It strikes the heart! It is like reaching hands
That grope beyond the stars, with faith to find.
Happiness? Nay, I know not. As the storm,
The singing gathers. Pain? He understands
Who drinks of it. There is a dream behind!

LIV

I had a dream, once—was it lives ago?
Beauty, the followed after, the first glint that went
From charmed horizons of blue seas, was pent
At last, a butterfly, and gazed on; so,
Proven but Love, the abashed yet leaning low
From sky-tops in grave woods, or deeply blent,
In apple-blooms, with that old merriment,
Sipped like a fragrance, dead worlds used to know.
All is not loss: there is a dream behind,
Made pitiful by loving. Death and pain

Sonnets from the Pursuit of Happiness

Deter not, but are climbed upon; the hour
Breaks; the dream lives. It fades not; it will find!
(I fling me prone before one startled flower,
Breathless, and love's pursuit goes on again.)

LV

A factory in the fields, whose windows flare
Unearthly, once a sundown; a drab door
A blue-eyed barefoot sits and laughs before;
A whistle down the railroad, going where?—
So dreams begin. It is not far, nor rare,
Yet tasting of it is to drink no more
Sleep, or soothed limbs, or drowsy mandragore:
But heartaches, and hurt fingers—these are there.
The wind has need of us; the violets blow
One hillslope yonder—still the old endeavor!
Youth calls, and happiness is just ahead!
Who lives to it?—the lonely wanderers know.
There is a beauty, after all is said—
And after all is sung—unreached forever.

THE GARDEN OF SLEEP

BENEATH the sunlight and the wide, sweet skies,
Immersed in purple shade,
The garden of the well-belovèd lies,
And looses to the world through half-shut eyes
Dreamings too deep to fade.

Adown the sloping verdures of its breast,
In long, unordered row,
Are laid alike the lately-bidden guest
And they that herein entered into rest
A hundred years ago.

And all alike perpetually share,
Past understanding, peace;
On all is shed the tranquilizing air
Of easeful earth, and silence everywhere
Has everlasting lease.

They are securest, they that slumber here,
And know no troubled sleep;
Unvisited are they of fret or fear,
Nor earthly perilings to them draw near
Whom all the heavens keep.

No passionate persuadings rim them round,
With afterword of woe;

The Garden of Sleep

No stir is here, no restless songs resound,—
Save of the birds, and leaves that on the ground
 The changing seasons sow.

They are unsorrowful,—Time's hurried feet
 No longer fashion pain;
For in the years' inevitable beat,
The loved and parted here once more may meet,
 And meeting, here remain.

We call them dead, and weep that they must die:
 Ah, tenderness and tears!
That lips on lips unanswered must lie,
And warm entreaty fall without reply
 On once so heedful ears.

We call them dead, that on the breast of sleep
 Beyond our borders go;
Yet know we not what hovers in the deep,
Dark-furrowed lineaments of Death, and weep
 Because we do not know.

But I have seen the sunlight from the West
 Wane with the tide away,
And watched the heavens, rosily distressed,
Grow pale, and shed those tears of stars that rest
 Upon the fringe of Day:

And I have trod the thunder-throated strand
 Of bright, perplexing seas;

The Garden of Sleep

Looked into Summer's eyes and Autumn's hand,
And heard a lover in his lover's land
Of immortalities.

These silent lips and unillumined eyes,
All-eloquent of death,
They too have learned of love, and waxed wise
In that rare wisdom lingering in skies,
Or in a flower's breath:

They too have felt unutterable things,
The sweet, half-prisoned flow
Of high infinities; the poise of wings
On ecstasies of song no poet sings;—
More bliss than lovers know.

And here they lie, the well-belovèd, here,
With cypress and with yew;
They dreamed as I, and this, their sleep austere,
Is but a severing, a soul got clear,
And they . . . their dreams are true.

EPILOGUE*

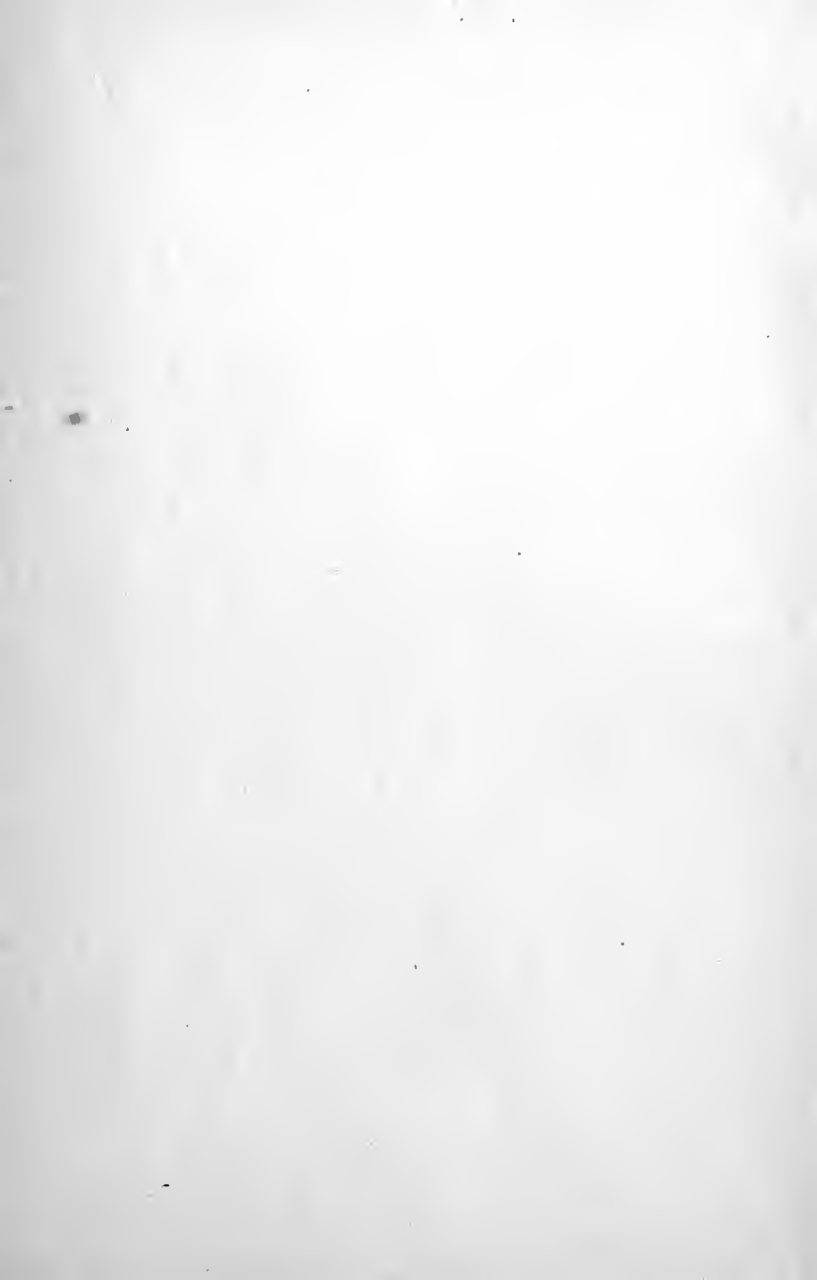
To cross no bar; to heed no lonely bell:
Let me, like this, at twilight-sweet embark
Where a faint river widens to the dark,
And down the banks there follows a farewell.

Let Beauty hold my finger-tips, this wise,
With broken music of a wandering bird,
Or, down a lane, a little laughter heard:
Let me smell land after it leaves my eyes.

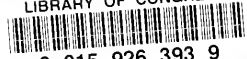
Let me lie still, with starlight on my face;
And shadows of great hills that loom ahead
Shall write the dreams there of the unclouded dead.
I shall not wake, but I shall know the place.

Shoaling tho' shallows run; tho' years run low;
A ship may take a lantern and get free:
Till then—warm earth is very dear to me;
Sure as the dawn the city where I go.

* From Scribner's Magazine, August, 1920.



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